Heaven on Earth: Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues

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Blessed are You, YHWH, the Sage of all
mysteries (*Hakham ha-razim*) and Lord of all secrets.
—*Merkavah Rabbah*

FIFTY YEARS AGO, Erwin R. Goodenough published the first volume in his monumental compendium *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*.[1] Goodenough's research on Jewish art arose from his interest in early Christianity. He assumed that the hellenized elements in Christianity had been borrowed or absorbed from a hellenized form of Judaism. At the time Goodenough first reached this conclusion, most scholars viewed Roman-period Judaism as normative and rabbinic. Goodenough initially found support for the existence of a nonrabbinic, hellenized form of Judaism in the writings of Philo. Soon afterward, the synagogue at Dura Europos, with its stunning cycle of paintings, came to light. These paintings and Jewish art from elsewhere in the Roman world, especially Palestine, provided Goodenough with the evidence he believed he needed to prove the existence of a hellenized form of Judaism. By the time Goodenough finished assembling this evidence, he had filled twelve volumes.

1 New York, 1953.

Goodenough suggested that we have little or no literary evidence for this hellenized Judaism because the writings of these hellenized Jews were preserved neither by the rabbis nor by Christians:

So if hellenized Jews did exist and write books in the early Christian centuries, neither Christians nor the rabbinic Jews who ultimately dominated Judaism would have cared to preserve their writings.... It would indeed be a large argument from silence to assert that no Jew who spoke only Greek ever wrote a book on his faith after Philo. There may have been very extensive writing done by Jews of the Roman world in the Christian centuries, but since if books were written in Greek by Jews neither Christians nor rabbis would have cared to preserve them, they would have perished. That we have no writings from these Jews simply indicates that if they did write, as we must presume some of them did, they wrote books of a kind unpleasing to the rabbis, and, of course, to the Christians.[2]

Based on his interpretation of the images, Goodenough believed that the Judaism that produced this art was not only hellenized but mystical and "spiritual," in contrast to the strict legalism of the rabbis.[3]

Goodenough's work forced scholars to acknowledge the existence of figured Jewish art in the Roman world, contradicting the widespread belief that all ancient Jewish art was aniconic. However, his claim that this art was associated with an unknown form of hellenized, mystical Judaism has been almost universally rejected. As Morton Smith noted, "Goodenough's theory falsifies the situation by substituting a single, anti-rabbinic, mystical Judaism for the enormous variety of personal, doctrinal, political, and cultural divergencies which the rabbinic and other evidence reveals, and by supposing a sharp division between rabbinic and anti-rabbinic Judaism, whereas actually there seems to have been a confused gradation."[4] Unfortunately, Smith's observation regarding the existence of different groups in post-70 Judaism has been largely ignored in subsequent discussions of this art. Instead most archaeologists and art historians since Goodenough's time have continued to interpret these images within the context of rabbinic Judaism or in relation to early Christian or pagan art.[5]

I suggest that Goodenough's interpretation was closer to the target: the images that decorate ancient Palestinian synagogues should be understood in relation to a mystical and nonrabbinic form (or forms) of Judaism. Not that we should ignore the rabbinic evidence; to the contrary, the rabbis lived in the same world as did the Jews who made and used these works of art. Their writings provide valuable (albeit incomplete or biased) information on the beliefs and practices of other Jewish groups. And, of course, the distinctions between the beliefs and practices of different groups are not always clear-cut (at least, not to us). Our sources indicate that various Jewish groups existed in Judea before 70 CE, including Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Hasidim, and Boethusians.[6] It would be just as misleading to study Judaism before 70 only in the context of the sectarian writings from Qumran as it is to understand the Jewish art after 70 only within the context of rabbinic Judaism and its writings. Why assume that Jewish society after 70 was any less diverse than it was before 70? As Martin Goodman stated, "The standard assumption that these Jewish groups disappeared soon after 70 is therefore no more than an assumption. Furthermore, the presuppositions which have encouraged the assumption are so theologically loaded that historians' suspicions should be instinctive.... My hypothesis is that groups and philosophies known from pre-

2 E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, abr. and ed. J. Neusner (Princeton, N.J., 1988), 11.

3 Ibid., 21–22. Goodenough was trying to overturn the prevailing view of a monolithic, normative, rabbinic Judaism that had been articulated by scholars such as George Foot Moore; see *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966). Naomi Janowitz notes that the use of the term *mysticism* to describe spiritual versus legalistic modes of religious expression comes from Christian writers; see *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity* (University Park, Pa., 2002), xv.

4 "Goodenough's Symbols in Retrospect," *JBL* 86 (1967): 65.

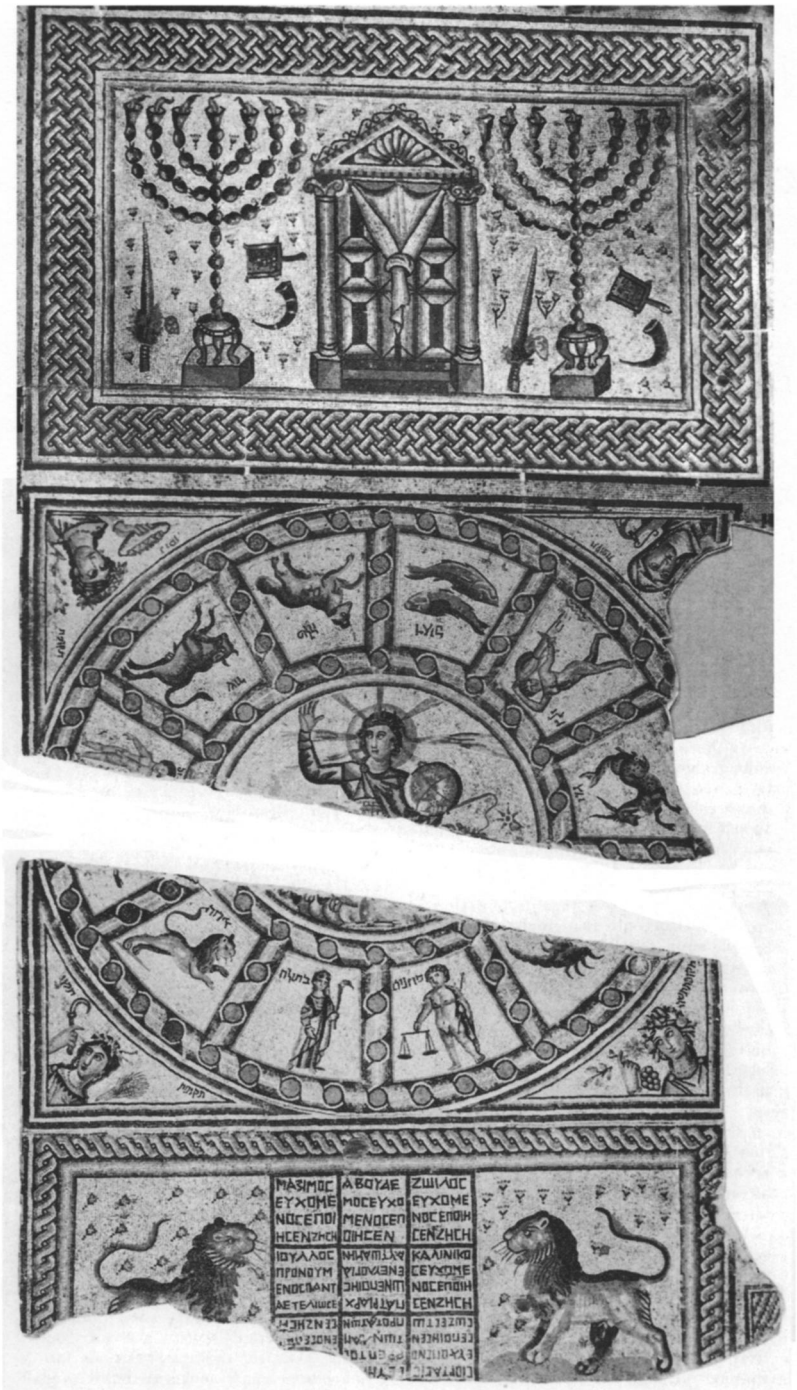
5 See, for example, Z. Weiss and E. Netzer, *Promise and Redemption: A Synagogue Mosaic from Sepphoris* (Jerusalem, 1996). On the other hand, Seth Schwartz has recently cautioned against "a Rabbinizing approach to synagogue art"; see "On the Program and Reception of the Synagogue Mosaics," in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine and Z. Weiss (Portsmouth, 2000), 166–68. I do not view the rabbis or the priestly class as monolithic groups, nor do I suggest that the images in the synagogue mosaics simply reflect a struggle between these groups (or between Jews and Christians). Instead, I attempt to remove the consideration of the iconography of these mosaics from the traditional rabbinocentric perspective, and to argue that they provide evidence for the interests of at least one more influential Jewish group in late antique Palestine—the priestly class. Although there were surely many other Jewish groups, the evidence examined here does not enable me to identify them. For priests who were rabbis and priests who were not members of the aristocracy, see S. S. Miller, "Those Cantankerous Sepphoreans Revisited," in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. R. Chazan, W. W. Hallo, and L. H. Schiffman (Winona Lake, Ind., 1999), 559.

6 The Talmud itself refers to 24 sects, as noted by D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, 1999), 2.

Fig. 1 Map of Palestine showing the locations of ancient synagogues (reproduced by permission of the Israel Exploration Society; adapted by www.archeographics.com)

70 Judaism continued for years, perhaps centuries, after the destruction of the Temple."[7] Even if Jewish groups changed or were reconfigured after 70, rabbinic norms were just one of many, and different Jewish groups were in dialogue and tension with each other.[8]

Goodenough sensed that the images he collected were mystical and therefore compared them to Dionysiac imagery in pagan art. I disagree with Goodenough's characterization of the Jews who made or used these works of art



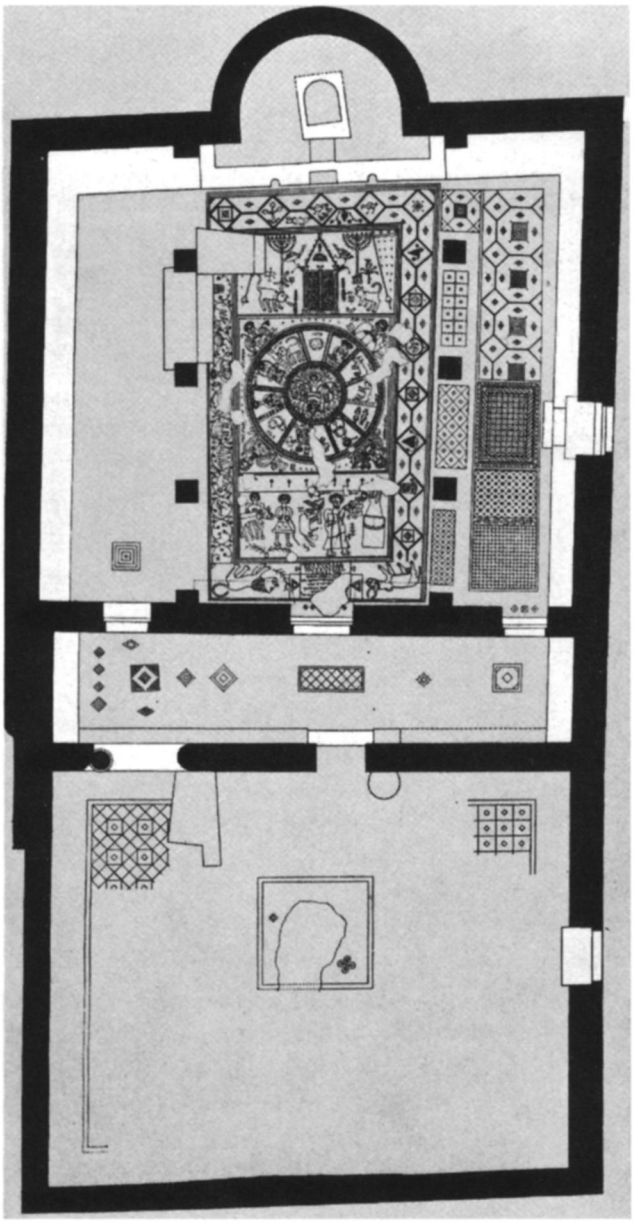
7 "Sadducees and Essenes after 70 CE," in *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder*, ed. S. E. Porter, P. Joyce, and D. E. Orton (Leiden, 1994), 348, 355. Goodman's observation may be supported by evidence for 3rd-century Galilean Jewish-Christians (Christians who were apparently ethnic Jews) with Pharisaic leanings; see Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 29; A. I. Baumgarten, "Literary Evidence for Jewish Christianity in the Galilee," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine (New York, 1992), 39–50. Also see M. D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), 83, 11: "Recently, though, there has been increased recognition that ancient Palestinian and Babylonian Jewish societies were complex ones, encompassing tensions between circles within the rabbinic estate, and between the academy and other sectors of the population."

8 See S. Schwartz, "Rabbinization in the Sixth Century," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. P. Schäfer and C. Hezser (Tübingen, 1998–2002), 3:56–57. For the view that Christians should be considered as a Jewish group during this period, see Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 17, 23. According to Goodman, the rabbis viewed Christianity as another form of gentile "alien worship"; see M. Goodman, "Palestinian Rabbis and the Conversion of Constantine to Christianity," in *Talmud Yerushalmi*, 2:5.

Fig. 2 The nave mosaics in the Stratum IIa synagogue ("Synagogue of Severos"), Hammath Tiberias (reproduced by permission of the Israel Exploration Society)

as "hellenized," although the figured images are Greco-Roman in origin. I also believe that Goodenough went too far in his mystical interpretations and that the comparisons with Dionysiac imagery are inappropriate. We shall see that a mystical interpretation of another sort is supported by the Qumran literature and by hekhalot (Jewish mystical) literature, much of which was unavailable at the time Goodenough wrote.[9] In fact, this is the type of Jewish literature that Goodenough supposed must have existed but was not preserved.[10]

In this study, I focus on the interpretation of Helios and the zodiac cycle. A panel containing this motif has been discovered in the mosaic floors of six ancient synagogues in Palestine (fig. 1): at Hammath Tiberias (fig. 2), Beth Alpha (fig. 3), Na'aran, Khirbet (Ḥorvat) Susiya, Husifa, and Sepphoris (figs. 4, 5).[11] All six examples repeat the same basic composition, with the circle of the zodiac

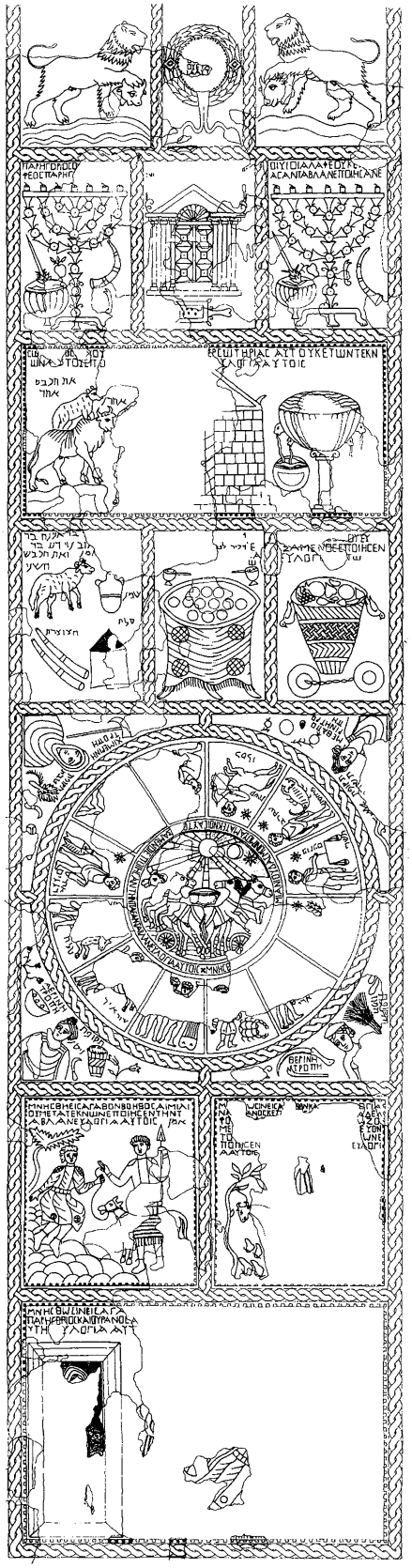


9 In addition, the Christian Gnostic manuscripts from Nag Hammadi were discovered only in 1945; for an English translation, see J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4th rev. ed. (Leiden, 1996). But Goodenough was aware of Gershom Scholem's work on Jewish mysticism; see Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, abr. ed., 8, 21 (n. 2 above).

10 R. Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism*, trans. D. Lourish (Oxford, 2004), 207, 231, observes that this Zadokite priestly literature had virtually disappeared from Jewish tradition until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and concludes that "all such deviant traditions and their bearers were therefore marginalized or totally suppressed [by the rabbis]" (207). Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, xvii (n. 3 above), noted that hekhalot literature is still marginalized in the study of rabbinic-period Judaism. But as I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980), 132, observed, the concern expressed in hekhalot literature with the study of Jewish law indicates that it is associated with the "heart of Judaism" of the period and not with marginal, heterodox groups.

11 The mosaic floor in the synagogue at Japhia in Israel's Lower Galilee was decorated either with a seventh example of the Helios and zodiac cycle motif or with the symbols of the twelve tribes. The central circle (not preserved) was surrounded by twelve smaller circles connected by an interlocking guilloche. The only figures still extant are an ox and a bull in two of the smaller circles. A panel at the southwest end of the nave contained a depiction of an eagle with outstretched wings over the head of a figure identified as Helios or Medusa; see D. Barag, "Japhia," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem–New York, 1993), 660.

Fig. 3 Plan of the Beth Alpha synagogue (reproduced by permission of the Israel Exploration Society)



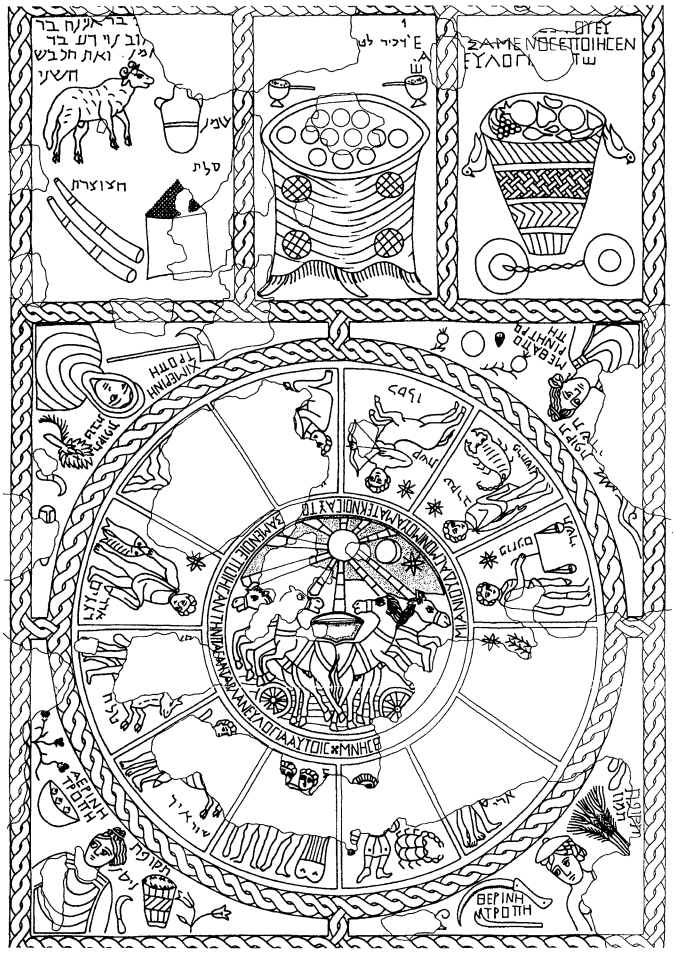


Fig. 4 Drawing of the mosaic floor in the Sepphoris synagogue (copyright *Journal of Roman Archaeology*; reproduced by permission of *JRA* and Z. Weiss)

Fig. 5 Drawing of the fourth and fifth bands in the Sepphoris synagogue mosaic, showing (*above*) items associated with the perpetual sacrifice offered daily in the Tabernacle or Temple, including a lamb, oil, flour, and trumpets (*left*), the showbread table (*center*), and a basket of first fruits (*right*); and (*below*) Helios and the zodiac cycle (copyright *Journal of Roman Archaeology*; reproduced by permission of *JRA* and Z. Weiss)

Fig. 6 The inscription in the mosaic floor of the Ein Gedi synagogue (reproduced by permission of the Israel Exploration Society)

inscribed in a square and the four seasons in the corners.[12] In addition a Hebrew inscription in the floor of the synagogue at Ein Gedi lists the twelve signs of the zodiac followed by the twelve Hebrew months (fig. 6).[13] At Hammath Tiberias, Beth Alpha, Na'aran, and Sepphoris, the medallion in the center of the zodiac cycle is still preserved, and it contains a depiction of Helios in his chariot.[14]

Scholars have suggested that this motif represents a kind of liturgical calendar, or that it had magical, cosmic, or astrological significance. Why did some Palestinian Jewish congregations place the figure of the Greco-Roman sun god in a central position in their synagogues? I propose that Helios and the zodiac cycle should be understood within the context of several contemporary and related phenomena: the rise of Christianity; the emergence or strengthening of the Jewish priestly class in late antique Palestine; and the magical-mystical beliefs and practices described in hekhalot literature.[15] Hekhalot literature is

12 See L. A. Roussin, "The Zodiac in Synagogue Decoration," in *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Periods*, ed. D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough (Atlanta, 1997), 83–84; R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Leiden, 1988), 301–8; B. Kühnel, "The Synagogue Floor Mosaic in Sepphoris: Between Paganism and Christianity," in *From Dura to Sepphoris*, 31–43 (n. 5 above).

13 D. Barag, Y. Porat, and E. Netzer, "The Synagogue at 'En-Gedi," in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem, 1981), 118.

14 At Sepphoris, an aniconic Helios; see Weiss and Netzer, *Promise and Redemption*, 28, 35–36 (n. 5 above); Z. Weiss, "The Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26 (2000): 58; idem, "The Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic and the Role of Talmudic Literature in Its Iconographical Study," in *From Dura to Sepphoris*, 22–23. The final report on the Sepphoris synagogue appeared in print when this study was in press. See Z. Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient Message through Its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contexts* (Jerusalem, 2005).

15 For the history and sources of the motif of Helios and the zodiac cycle, see G. Foerster, "Representations of the Zodiac in Ancient Synagogues and Their Iconographic Sources," *Eretz-Israel* 18 (1985): 380–91 (in Hebrew). Because Foerster and others have considered the Mithraic (and other Hellenistic-Roman and Near Eastern) parallels, and because there is no evidence for the motif of Helios and the zodiac cycle in Palestinian Jewish contexts before the late 4th century, I do not include a discussion of Mithraic iconography. In this study I use the terms *magic* and *mysticism*; however, Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, xiv (n. 3 above), has suggested substituting the term *ritual practices*, since *magic* and *mysticism* have traditionally been employed polemically as pejorative labels by the opponents of these practices. Also see R. M. Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Harrisburg, 1998), 11, 59, who describes these practices as "ritual performances to gain power."

so called because it describes heavenly *hekhalot* (temples), where the heavens are a temple containing a varying number of shrines composed of firmaments, angels, chariots, legions, hosts, and other wondrous phenomena and beings. In my opinion, the figure of Helios was also intended to represent Metatron, the divine super-angel who has been compelled by an adept to appear and impart Torah knowledge to the congregation. I begin by examining the chronology of the synagogue at Hammath Tiberias, which is by the Sea of Galilee and is decorated with the earliest datable example of a mosaic floor with Helios and the zodiac cycle.[16] My discussion and proposed redating of this mosaic to the late fourth or early fifth century (instead of the early fourth century) set the stage for a reevaluation of the significance of Helios and the zodiac cycle.

Hammath Tiberias

In his 1961–65 excavations at Hammath Tiberias, Moshe Dothan uncovered the remains of four synagogue buildings, one above the other. According to Dothan, the earliest synagogue, of Stratum IIb, was constructed during the first half of the third century (ca. 230).[17] He suggested that this synagogue was destroyed in the earthquake of 306, and that the next synagogue, of Stratum IIa, was established during the first quarter of the fourth century.[18] This building, which he called the Synagogue of Severos, has a mosaic floor decorated with Helios and the zodiac cycle (fig. 7).[19] On the basis of the pottery and the coins (the latest of which dated to 395), Dothan dated the end of this synagogue's occupation to the late fourth or early fifth century.[20] He suggested that this synagogue was destroyed by the earthquake of 419.[21] According to Dothan, the next synagogue (of Stratum Ib) was erected immediately after the earthquake and was completed by 423.[22] The layout of the Stratum Ib synagogue was completely different from the broadhouse of Stratum IIa. It had a basilical plan, with three rows of columns creating aisles that encircled the nave on the north, east, and west sides, and an interior apse on the south.[23] The hall was paved with polychrome mosaics depicting floral and animal designs.[24] According to Dothan, the Stratum Ib synagogue was damaged around the time of the Muslim conquest in the first half of the seventh century and was then rebuilt along similar lines (Stratum Ia). The Stratum Ia synagogue remained in use until it was destroyed in the mid-eighth century, perhaps by an earthquake.[25]

The End Date for the Occupation of the Stratum IIa Synagogue ("Synagogue of Severos")

An analysis of the published evidence suggests that Dothan's chronology for all these buildings, which is based largely on the numismatic evidence, is too early.[26] He seems to have associated at least some of the coins with certain strata based on the coins' dates instead of on their archaeological context: "The earliest coin in Stratum II is of Julia Maesa from Caesarea Paneas (220). Chronologically, this coin precedes the coins of Elagabalus, Gordianus, Alexander Severus, and other emperors of the 3rd century found in this stratum. *It may be assumed* that they originated in the early synagogue (IIb)" (my emphasis).[27] Most of the fourth century coins come from a treasury (L52) in the Stratum IIa synagogue. This consisted of a cist sunk into the western side of the raised platform (presumably for the Torah shrine) at the end of the nave. The latest identifiable coin was that of Valentinian II (383 CE). Most of the 31 small bronze coins from this locus were too worn to be identifiable. According to the report, "In shape and size, however, they seem to be attributable to Roman Imperial Coinage of the 4th–5th centuries; as we have identified among them only early 5th century coins, it

16 See M. Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, vol. 1, *Early Synagogues and the Hellenistic and Roman Remains* (Jerusalem, 1983), 48.

17 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:26, 66–67. For a recent reconsideration of the synagogue at Hammath Tiberias focusing on the motif of Helios and the zodiac cycle, see L. I. Levine, "Contextualizing Jewish Art: The Synagogues at Hammat Tiberias and Sepphoris," in *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire*, ed. R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz (Leuven, 2003), 97–115.

18 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:66–67.

19 Ibid., 1:57, 67.

20 Ibid., 1:64, 66.

21 M. Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, vol. 2, *Late Synagogues* (Jerusalem, 2000), 12.

22 *Hammath Tiberias*, 2:12.

23 Ibid., 2:12–18.

24 Ibid., 2:33–34.

25 Ibid., 2:93; M. Dotham, "Hammath-Tiberias," in *New Encyclopedia*, 577 (n. 11 above); idem, "The Synagogue at Hammath-Tiberias," in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 68–69 (n. 13 above). But according to Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 2:37, the Stratum Ib synagogue was destroyed in the mid-8th century.

26 Because the pottery and coins from the synagogues of Strata IIb and IIa are published without any context (that is, without locus numbers or a description of what was found above or below the floor levels), it is difficult to determine the precise dates of these buildings. In addition, although the locus numbers and stratum assignments of the pottery and lamps are provided for the Stratum Ib and Stratum Ia synagogues, there are no clean Stratum Ib loci. In other words, all of this material comes either from mixed Strata Ib and Ia contexts, or from Stratum Ia contexts; see Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 2:123–29. There is also no indication as to whether the material comes from above or below the floor levels.

27 Ibid., 1:64.

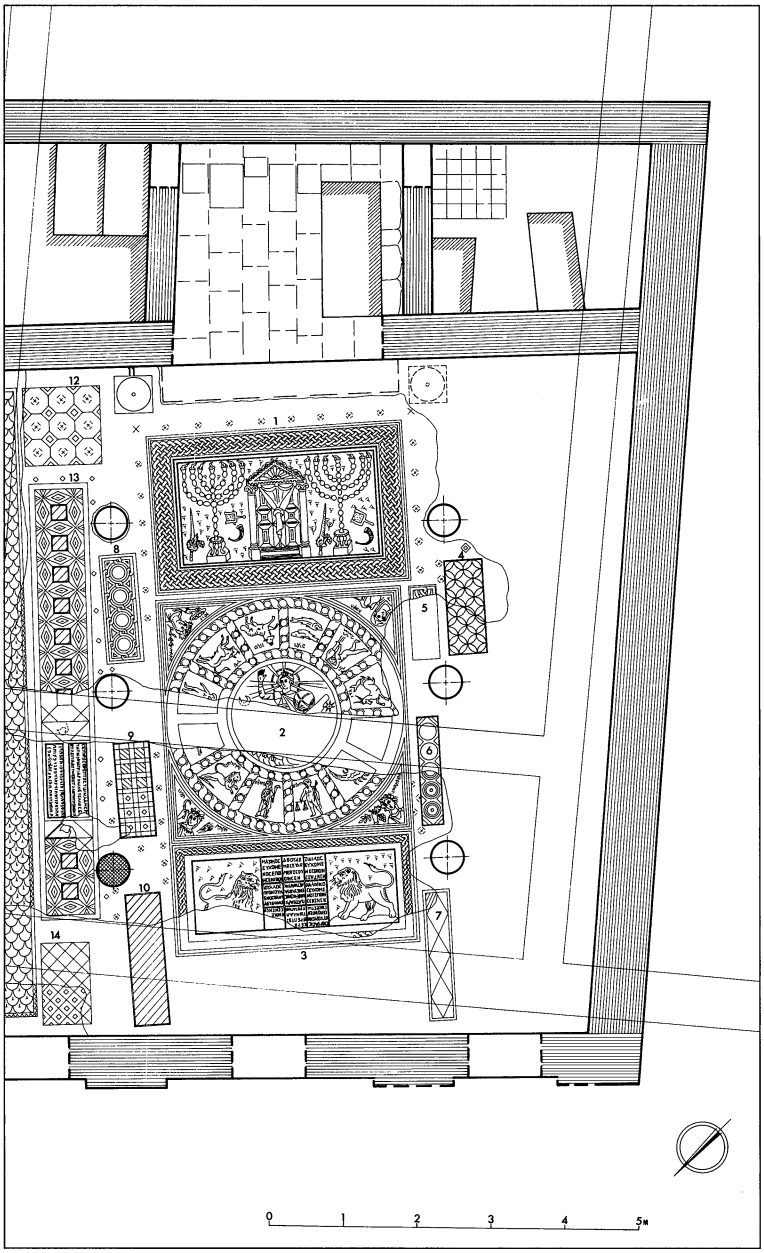


Fig. 7 Plan of the Stratum IIa synagogue ("Synagogue of Severos"), Hammath Tiberias (reproduced by permission of the Israel Exploration Society).

seems probable that those which are too worn are also from the beginning of the 5th century."[28] Dothan concluded that these coins provide an early fifth-century terminus post quem for the end of the Stratum IIa synagogue.[29]

In addition to these coins, many oil-lamp fragments were found on the floor of L52. They include lamps with a bow-shaped nozzle, a type associated with the potters' workshop at Beit Nattif in Judea. This type has a range from the second half of the third century to the fifth century.[30] The circular shape of the body and the size of the filling hole of some of the lamps point to a similar or slightly earlier date.[31] Although the northern-type oil lamps with impressed or incised decoration have traditionally been dated from the third to mid-fourth century, recent evidence suggests that they are either later or that they continued into the fifth century and perhaps later.[32]

28 L. Y. Rahmani and M. Sharabani, "Appendix: Catalogue of Coins," in Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias,* 1:74.

29 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:65–66.

30 Ibid., 1:65, fig. 5: A–B, pl. 24:2, 6. Because no descriptions of the illustrated pottery survive, it is impossible to determine whether some of the other fragments, such as the multi-nozzled lamps, also represent this type; see J. Magness and G. Avni, "Jews and Christians in a Late Roman Cemetery at Beth Guvrin," in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, ed. H. Lapin (Potomac, Md., 1998), 94–95.

31 See Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:65, fig. 5: F, G, J.

32 See J. Magness, "The Question of the Synagogue: The Problem of Typology," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, pt. 3, *Where We Stand: Issues and Debates in Ancient Judaism*, vol. 4, *The Special Problem of the Synagogue*, ed. A. J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner (Leiden, 2001), 12 n. 15.

The pottery illustrated from Stratum II includes Galilean bowls and local cooking pots.[33] Some examples of the latest variant of Galilean bowls were "found in Loci 106 and 107, immediately below the flagstone floor of Stratum Ib."[34] According to David Adan-Bayewitz, this variant was common from the fourth to the early fifth century.[35] There are also two Late Roman "C" (Phocean Red Slip) Ware Form 3 bowls (one of which is nearly complete), dating from the mid-fifth to mid-sixth century.[36]

The presence of the Late Roman "C" Form 3 bowls indicates that the occupation of the Stratum IIa synagogue continued beyond the mid-fifth century. This is confirmed by the condition of the early fifth-century coins from L52 (perhaps including specimens from later in the fifth century), which were too worn to be read, indicating that they were in circulation for some time before being deposited. This evidence suggests that the Stratum IIa synagogue was occupied at least until the third quarter of the fifth century.

The Date of the Stratum Ib Synagogue

Dothan dated the construction of the synagogue immediately above that of Stratum IIa (that is, the synagogue of Stratum Ib, which was the first one with a basilical plan) to the years 420–23, and its destruction to the first half of the seventh century.[37] This chronology is not supported by the ceramic and numismatic evidence.[38] Unfortunately, all the pottery and coins published from Stratum Ib come from mixed Strata Ib–Ia contexts; none of this material is assigned to Stratum Ib alone. The earliest ceramic type illustrated from a Strata Ib–Ia context is a Fine Byzantine Ware (FBW) bowl of the mid-sixth to seventh century.[39] The other types represented in Strata Ib–Ia contexts include eighth- to ninth-century red-painted ware and glazed pottery of the ninth century and later. There are also buff ("Mefjer") ware vessels, a type that did not appear in Palestine before the second half of the eighth century. One buff-ware jug from "the end of Stratum Ib" is inscribed with a text that consists of Hebrew characters with a mixture of Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew elements.[40] The oil lamps from Strata Ib–Ia contexts are of the channel-nozzle type, with a range from the seventh to tenth centuries, though the high knob or tongue handle is characteristic of the eighth to tenth centuries.[41] The coins are consistent with the ceramic evidence. Those from Stratum Ib–Ia contexts range in date from the reign of Justin II (571–572) to the ʿAbbāsid period.[42] To summarize, the earliest coins from Strata Ib–Ia contexts are from the reign of Justin II, while the earliest ceramic type (the single FBW Form 1B bowl) dates from the mid-sixth to seventh century. Thus the ceramic and numismatic evidence provides a late sixth- to seventh-century terminus post quem for the construction of the Stratum Ib synagogue. The inscribed buff ware jug associated with this synagogue (as well as the other pottery and coins) indicates that the building remained in use until the second half of the eighth century or later.[43] According to Dothan, the Stratum Ib synagogue immediately succeeded that of Stratum IIa.[44] However, the apparent absence of ceramic types and coins suggests that there was a gap or period of abandonment between the end of Stratum IIa and the beginning of Stratum Ib. Based on the available evidence, this gap can be dated roughly from the late fifth century to the late sixth century.

The Construction Date of the Stratum IIa Synagogue ("Synagogue of Severos")

Is it possible to determine when the Stratum IIa synagogue was built? According to Dothan, this synagogue was constructed immediately after its predecessor in Stratum IIb went out of use. He used the third-century coins

33 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:63, fig. 4: A–L, N–O.

34 Ibid., 1:62 and 63, fig. 4: A, D, G; see D. Adan-Bayewitz, *Common Pottery in Roman Galilee: A Study of Local Trade* (Ramat-Gan, 1993), 103–9, Kefar Hananya Form 1E, dated from the mid-3rd to early 5th century.

35 *Common Pottery in Roman Galilee,* 107. See Magness, "Question of the Synagogue," 37 n. 109, for the suggestion that these local types are currently dated too early.

36 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:63, fig. 4: M, P, pl. 23:4. These are misidentified as African Red Slip Ware; according to Dothan, these bowls "are probably from Stratum IIa" (ibid., 62). For this type, see J. W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery* (London, 1972), 329–38; these bowls do not represent the earliest variants of this form. There are also two stamped Late Roman Red Ware fragments, including an African Red Slip Ware bowl stamped with a fringed concentric circle motif of the late 4th to the 3rd quarter of the 5th century; Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:63, fig. 4: Q, R, pl. 23:6, 7; see Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, 237, Type 36, and fig. 40.

37 See n. 25, above.

38 The same observation was made by B. L. Johnson, who published the pottery and coins from the later synagogues, and edited the report: "Although the date proposed by Prof. Dothan for Synagogue Ib appears reasonable from the historical and political point of view, it is not supported by the datable artifacts found at the site" (Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 2:93).

39 B. L. Johnson, "Pottery and Lamps," in ibid., 2:61–62, no. 71. The only other 6th- to 7th-century type illustrated is an Egyptian Red Slip Ware bowl fragment from a Stratum Ia context; ibid., 2:61.

40 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 2:102–3.

41 For the buff wares from Strata Ib–Ia contexts see Johnson, "Pottery and Lamps," 54–61, nos. 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 15, 17, 22, 26, 29, 32–35, 44, 53, 58–62, 69. For the red-painted wares from these contexts, see ibid., 65–67, nos. 90–93. For glazed wares from Strata Ib–Ia contexts, see ibid., 69–71, nos. 110, 112, 114. For the dating of these types, see J. Magness, "The Chronology of Capernaum in the Early Islamic Period," *JAOS* 117 (1997): 481–86; J. A. Sauer and J. Magness, "Ceramics: Ceramics of the Islamic Period," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East,* ed. E. M. Meyers (New York, 1997), 1:475–79; M. Avissar, "The Medieval Pottery," in *Yoqneʿam*, vol. 1, *The Late Periods*, by A. Ben-Tor, M. Avissar, and Y. Portugali, Qedem Reports 3 (Jerusalem, 1996), 75–82, 155–63; J. Magness, "The Dating of the Black Ceramic Bowl with a Depiction of the Torah Shrine from Nabratein," *Levant* 26 (1994): 199–206. For the oil lamps from Strata Ib–Ia contexts, see Johnson, "Pottery and Lamps," 75–82, nos. 1, 3, 6, 8, 10–11, 13, 15, 18–19, 30–31, 33. For the dating of these lamps, see Sauer and Magness, "Ceramics," 478–79; J. Magness, *Jerusalem Ceramic Chronology circa 200–800* CE (Sheffield, 1993), 255–58. The glazed cooking pan from a Strata Ib–Ia context, illustrated in Johnson, "Pottery and Lamps," 68–69, no. 104, dates from the second half of the 9th to the 10th century; see Avissar, "The Medieval Pottery," 139–41, Type 13. For a close (uninscribed) Islamic period parallel to the inscribed buff ware jug, see J. Magness, "The Byzantine and Islamic Poterry [sic] from Areas A2 and G," in *Excavations at the City of David 1978–1985, Directed by Yigal Shiloh*, vol. 3, *Stratigraphical, Environmental, and Other Reports*, ed. A. de Groot and D. T. Ariel, Qedem Reports 33 (Jerusalem, 1992), 165–66, fig. 12:20.

42 See N. Amitai-Preiss, "Byzantine and Medieval Coins from the Synagogue of Hammath Tiberias," in Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 2:95–99, nos. 1 (a coin of Justin II dated 571–72, from L54), 8 (a Byzantine or Byzantine-Arab coin from L54), 16 (an Umayyad coin from L54), 21 (an Umayyad coin from L10), 22 (an Umayyad coin from L10), 23 (an Umayyad coin from L12/2), 25 (an Umayyad coin from L54), 41 (an ʿAbbāsid coin from L14), 42 (an ʿAbbāsid coin dated 815–911, from L8), 43 (an ʿAbbāsid coin from L14), 45 (an ʿAbbāsid coin from L54), 49 (an ʿAbbāsid coin from L10).

43 For a recent reevaluation of the dating of the Strata Ib and Ia synagogues at Hammath Tiberias, see D. Stacey, "Review Article: The Later Synagogues at Hammath Tiberias and Problems of Dating the Islamic Phases and Pottery," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, ed. J. H. Humphrey (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2002), 3:253–60. Stacey suggests that the Stratum Ib synagogue was built in the early 7th century and survived until the earthquake of 749.

44 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 2:12.

and pottery found in the fills of Stratum II to date the synagogue of Stratum IIb: "The coins of Elagabalus (218–222 CE) provide a terminus post quem for the synagogue's construction, while the two coins of Alexander Severus (222–235 CE) seem to indicate the actual period of building."[45] These coins, of course, provide a third-century terminus post quem for the construction of the Stratum IIb synagogue.

Dothan cited two Greek inscriptions in support of an early fourth-century construction date for the Stratum IIa synagogue. One, in a panel at the entrance to the nave, reads: "Sever[os], disciple of the most illustrious Patriarchs, fulfilled (it). Blessings upon him. Amen."[46] The second inscription, located in a panel to the west of the nave, reads: "Severos, disciple (θρεπτὸς) of the most illustrious Patriarchs, completed (it). Blessings on him and on Ioullos the supervisor."[47] Dothan noted that "most illustrious" (Greek λαμπρότατος πατριάρχης, corresponding to Latin *vir clarissimus*) is the title given to the Jewish patriarch in an edict of the Theodosian Code dated to 392. This was the third-highest rank among the Roman officials, which meant that the patriarch belonged to the senatorial class. In 396–97 the patriarch still belonged to the senatorial class, but his title was now *illustris* (ἐνδοξότατος), which at this time began to be used instead of, or perhaps in addition to, *clarissimus*. Patriarch Gamaliel VI was called *vir spectabilis* in 404, and the senatorial rank was withdrawn altogether by Theodosios II in 415.[48] If these inscriptions refer to the patriarchate of the House of Hillel, they must have been laid before 396–97.[49] Based on his assumption that the patriarch was invested with the title λαμπρότατος during the reign of Diocletian or Constantine I, Dothan dated the construction of the Stratum IIa synagogue to this period and concluded that the inscriptions mentioning the "most illustrious Patriarchs" refer to Gamaliel IV or Judah III.[50] However, since we know that the patriarch held the title λαμπρότατος in 392, there is no reason why this mosaic floor, and with it the Stratum IIa synagogue, should not be dated to the late fourth century.[51] Consistent with this, the scale pattern decorating part of the mosaic floor is not attested at Antioch before the fifth century or in Palestine before the second half of the fourth century.[52] This synagogue was then occupied at least until the third quarter of the fifth century.

45 Ibid., 1:66.

46 Ibid., 1:55.

47 Ibid., 1:60.

48 Ibid., 1:58.

49 As Hayim Lapin pointed out to me, because this inscription mentions the patriarchs indirectly, the possibility remains that it postdates the lapsing of the patriarchate. I also wonder whether the patriarchs mentioned in connection with Severos must have belonged to the House of Hillel, since the title λαμπρότατος occurs three times in two Jewish inscriptions of the 5th and 6th centuries from Palestine, and patriarchs are mentioned in three Jewish inscriptions, including one reference to a synagogue official (see Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:59). According to Dothan, these "minor patriarchs" headed Jewish communities in various locales.

50 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:58–59.

51 M. Goodman, "The Roman State and the Jewish Patriarchate in the Third Century," in *Galilee in Late Antiquity*, 130 n. 11 (n. 7 above), pointed out that only from the mid-4th century and later do we have evidence of a patriarch achieving the status of a *clarissimus*, and that the patriarch's power peaked in the late 380s. Goodman therefore concluded that the Hammath Tiberias inscriptions should be dated to the later 4th century. Lee Levine has noted that the patriarchate reached the peak of its prestige and power shortly before its disappearance around 425; see "The Patriarchate and the Ancient Synagogue," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. S. Fine (London, 1999), 94, 97; also see S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton, 2001), 116, 120. Using stylistic criteria, Rina Talgam has suggested that the Stratum IIa synagogue at Hammath Tiberias should be dated to the second half of the 4th century; see "Similarities and Differences between Synagogue and Church Mosaics in Palestine during the Byzantine and Umayyad Periods," in *From Dura to Sepphoris*, 100 (n. 5 above).

52 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:52. One of the three Palestinian examples cited by Dothan is the southern aisle of Constantine's Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. However, Avi-Yonah noted that, since this floor is at a level higher than the original floor, it must represent a repaving of the 5th century; see M. Avi-Yonah, "Bethlehem: The Church of the Nativity," in *New Encyclopedia*, 206 (n. 11 above).

This chronology accords well with the ceramic and numismatic evidence. The earliest synagogue (Stratum IIb) should therefore be dated to the fourth century instead of to the third century.

To summarize, the chronology of the four synagogue buildings at Hammath Tiberias (from bottom/earliest to top/latest) follows:

	Dothan's dates	Magness's dates
Stratum IIb	built circa 230, destroyed by earthquake of 306	dates to 4th century
Stratum IIa ("Synagogue of Severos")	built in 1st quarter of 4th century, destroyed by earthquake of 419	built in late 4th–early 5th century and occupied until 3rd quarter of 5th century or later
Stratum Ib	built after earthquake of 419, completed by 423, damaged in 1st half of 7th century	built in late 6th or 7th century, occupied until 2nd half of 8th century or later
Stratum Ia	built in 1st half of 7th century, destroyed in earthquake of 749	9th–10th centuries

Judaism and the Rise of Christianity

"Competitive Interpretation" in Art and Architecture

As this review has shown, the earliest example of a synagogue mosaic decorated with Helios and the zodiac cycle (at Hammath Tiberias) dates to the late fourth century. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Galilean-type synagogues at Gush Halav and Capernaum were established no earlier than the second half of the fifth century and the first half of the sixth century, respectively.[53] At Khirbet Shema', there is evidence for only one synagogue building, which was apparently constructed in the late fourth or early fifth century.[54] This accumulating body of evidence indicates that the traditional typology of ancient Palestinian synagogues must be revised. Although the institution of the synagogue had developed much earlier, the buildings that housed these gatherings developed a monumental architectural style and distinctive types of decoration during only the fourth century, especially its latter part.[55] I believe that the rise of monumental synagogue architecture and art at this time should be understood in relation to contemporary developments in Christianity.[56]

The Piacenza Pilgrim, who visited Palestine around 570, provides valuable testimony regarding the coexistence of Jewish communities and synagogue

53 Magness, "Question of the Synagogue" (n. 32 above).

54 See J. Magness, "Synagogue Typology and Earthquake Chronology at Khirbet Shema', Israel," *JFA* 24 (1997): 211–20.

55 For a similar observation see Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 205: "The earliest archaeological remains of an urban synagogue—perhaps of any synagogue—in post-Destruction Palestine are from Hamat Tiberias." In this study I refer only to Palestine, since the early date (3rd century CE) of the Dura Europos synagogue indicates that developments in the Diaspora must be considered independently.

56 Also see ibid., 202: "The great period of synagogue construction was also the great period of church construction." Note that synagogues are rarely mentioned by the earlier church fathers, but they first receive more attention from Christian writers in the 2nd half of the 4th century; see W. Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh, 1998), 227. In my opinion, developments in (figured) Jewish art parallel those in Christian art. P. C. Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York, 1994), discusses the relatively late appearance of Christian art (post-200). As A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins*, trans. T. Grabar (London, 1968), 27, observed, "Whatever the exact order of their appearance may have been, the Jewish and Christian iconographies began at the same period and probably more or less simultaneously." For the effects of the legalization of Christianity in the 4th century on Christianity and Judaism, see Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 18–19 (n. 6 above).

buildings with Byzantine Christian communities and churches. In Nazareth he describes seeing a synagogue in which "is kept the book on which the Lord wrote his ABC, and in this synagogue there is the bench on which he sat with the other children. Christians can lift the bench and move it about, but the Jews are completely unable to move it, and cannot drag it outside."[57] Regarding the Jewish population, he observed that "the Jewesses of that city [Nazareth] are better looking than any other Jewesses in the whole country," and that "there is no love lost between Jews and Christians."[58] These passages suggest that Jewish-Christian relations in Byzantine-period Galilee were complex.[59] On the one hand, these communities lived close to each other, and Christians even visited synagogue buildings. The synagogue that the Piacenza Pilgrim visited was located in Nazareth, one of the most important Christian pilgrimage sites in Byzantine Palestine. On the other hand, the pilgrim's account suggests tension between the Jewish and Christian communities. Such ambivalence is reflected in contemporary Jewish and Christian art, including the motif of Helios and the zodiac cycle.

Many of the biblical scenes represented in synagogue mosaics were also used in contemporary Christian art (such as the binding of Isaac, Daniel in the Lion's Den, Noah's Ark, and the visitation of Abraham by the three angels announcing Isaac's birth).[60] As Steven Fine has remarked, "Significantly, the only distinctively Jewish contents that can be identified in the Sepphoris mosaic are the Torah shrine panel and the images of vessels from the Temple cult. In fact, without the menorahs and the Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic inscriptions, the synagogue floor might be mistaken for a church mosaic!"[61] Joan Branham has noted that Christian sources reveal a fascination with and desire to claim the sanctity associated with the destroyed Temple, as well as an attempt to sever the institution of the synagogue from its Jewish ancestry.[62] The rise of monumental synagogue architecture and art, the development of a synagogue liturgy and liturgical furniture, and perhaps the strengthening of the Jewish priestly class should be viewed against this struggle between Jews and Christians over the claim to the Temple traditions.[63] All this may have led to the development of a concept of "Temple space" within the walls of synagogues.[64] Ancient synagogues became the locus of priestly memorialization of Temple liturgy and the symbolic re-creation of Temple space through certain physical actions.[65] Jews and Christians appropriated each other's visual language and symbols in their attempts to claim the Temple.[66] Art and architecture express this "competitive interpretation."[67] Thus, as Branham notes, "Although chancel arrangements in churches and synagogues correspond to unanalogous liturgical activities...the division of synagogue interior spaces may have signaled comparable implications of hierarchy and sacrality."[68] In synagogues the chancel area recreated the Temple space, where the priestly class once performed.[69]

57 J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977), 79.

58 Ibid., 79, 81.

59 For a discussion of these passages, see A. S. Jacobs, "Visible Ghosts and Invisible Demons: The Place of Jews in Early Christian Terra Sancta," in *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures*, ed. E. M. Meyers (Winona Lake, Ind., 1999), 374.

60 See S. Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame, 1997), 124; H. L. Kessler, "The Sepphoris Mosaic and Christian Art," in *From Dura to Sepphoris*, 64–72 (n. 5 above); Talgam, "Similarities and Differences" (n. 51 above); R. M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London, 2000).

61 "Art and the Liturgical Context of the Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," in *Galilee through the Centuries*, 232.

62 "Sacred Space under Erasure in Ancient Synagogues and Early Churches," *ArtB* 74 (1992): 387. Many of the biblical passages represented in the Dura Europos synagogue are among those central to Jewish and Christian polemics; see K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, D.C., 1989), 179.

63 For the rise of a synagogue hierarchy, including epigraphic and literary references to the priest, or *hieros*, see Branham, "Sacred Space under Erasure," 386–87, including n. 63.

64 Ibid., 387.

65 Ibid., 391.

66 The following observation by Boyarin about Jewish and Christian martyrdom applies equally to the artistic motifs and literary themes discussed here: "We must think of circulating and recirculating motifs, themes, and religious ideas in the making of martyrdom, a recirculation between Christians and Jews that allows for no simple litany of origins and influence" (Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 118 [n. 6 above]; see also ibid., 125: "We need to think about the multifold dimensions of intergroup interactions, from dialogue to polemic.").

67 For the phrase see M. Himmelfarb, "The Mother of the Messiah in the Talmud Yerushalmi and Sefer Zerubbabel," in *Talmud Yerushalmi*, 3:374 (n. 8 above); also see the conclusion to the present study.

68 "Sacred Space under Erasure," 386.

69 Ibid., 387. This is illustrated by a synagogue chancel screen from Ashkelon inscribed with a list of the priestly courses; see ibid.; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols* 1:220–21 (n. 1 above); E. L. Sukenik, "The Ancient Synagogue of el-Hammeh," *JPOS* 15 (1935): 156–57. For a more recent study of chancel screens in synagogues, see L. Habas, "The *Bema* and Chancel Screen in Synagogues and Their Origin," in *From Dura to Sepphoris*, 111–30 (n. 5 above). Habas rejects Branham's interpretation on the grounds that rabbinic sources do not attest to any segregation between the congregation and officeholders in synagogues (ibid., 129). However, she fails to consider that most if not all of the rabbinic sources antedate the appearance of chancel screens in synagogues.

Branham has noted that the Jerusalem Temple flanked by bulls and gazelles appears to be depicted in a mosaic floor panel behind the chancel screen of the late-sixth-century chapel of the Theotokos at Mount Nebo.[70] The Greek inscription above it reads, "Then they shall lay calves upon thy altar." This passage, from Psalm 51, which identifies the bulls represented in the mosaic as sacrificial animals, was part of the fourth-century Greek liturgy in Jerusalem. Repeated three times by the priest after offerings had been placed on the altar, it recalled the liturgy of the Jerusalem Temple.[71] Not only did Jews and Christians claim the Temple, but they sometimes depicted it in a similar manner, as seen in the mosaic floors of the synagogue at Khirbet Susiya and the chapel of the Priest John at Mount Nebo.[72] Dedicatory inscriptions found in other mosaics indicate that early Christians considered the church to be a temple.[73]

In his discussions of Helios and the zodiac cycle, Gideon Foerster made the following three points: (1) Helios and the zodiac cycle were intended to be a visual depiction and celebration of God's creation, the universe.[74] Helios thus represents the sun, surrounded by the signs of the zodiac and the seasons representing the heavens and the cycle of the year.[75] (2) These images were also intended to evoke the Temple. For example, the signs of the zodiac = the 12 tribes = the 12 vessels in the Temple = the 12 gems on the breastplate of the High Priest.[76] (3) These images corresponded with the liturgy in the synagogues; the *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) were a verbal expression of the images that surrounded the worshippers in the synagogues.[77]

Foerster concluded that Helios and the zodiac cycle were intended to represent and celebrate the order of God's universe.[78] He understood this motif as having multiple meanings: as a visual depiction and celebration of God's creation, the universe; as an evocation of the Jerusalem Temple; and as a reflection of the liturgy and piyyutim recited in the synagogues. These points correspond closely to the three systems of interpretation that Otto Demus described as underlying the decoration of Middle Byzantine churches. Although this type of decorative program developed much later, I believe that study of it can help us understand how the motif of Helios and the zodiac cycle functioned spatially in ancient synagogues. According to Demus: (1) the Byzantine church is an image of the cosmos, symbolizing heaven, paradise (or the Holy Land), and the terrestrial world in an ordered hierarchy, descending from the sphere of the cupolas, which represent heaven, to the earthly zone of the lower parts; (2) the building is conceived as the image of the places sanctified by Christ's earthly life; and (3) the church is an image of the festival cycle as laid down in the liturgy, and the icons are arranged in accordance with the liturgical sequence of the ecclesiastical festivals.[79]

70 "Sacred Space under Erasure," 381; see M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman, 1993), 151, no. 200. Also see Talgam, "Similarities and Differences," 107 (n. 51 above).

71 See Branham, "Sacred Space under Erasure," 381–82.

72 G. Foerster, "Allegorical and Symbolic Motifs with Christian Significance from Mosaic Pavements of Sixth-Century Palestinian Synagogues," in *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land, New Discoveries: Essays in Honor of Virgilio C. Corbo*, ed. G. C. Bottini, L. Di Segni, and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1990), 546–47. For these mosaics, see Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, 175, no. 228; S. Gutman, Z. Yeivin, and E. Netzer, "Excavations in the Synagogue at Horvat Susiya," in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 125 (n. 13 above). Also see Fine, *This Holy Place*, 120 (n. 60 above); Talgam, "Similarities and Differences," 107–8.

73 Talgam, "Similarities and Differences," 105.

74 "The Zodiac in Ancient Synagogues and Its Place in Jewish Thought and Literature," *Eretz-Israel* 19 (1987): 225 (in Hebrew); idem, "Representations of the Zodiac," 383 (n. 15 above).

75 Foerster, "Representations of the Zodiac," 382, 387.

76 Foerster, "Zodiac in Ancient Synagogues," 230. The identification of the twelve stones on the breastplate of the high priest with the signs of the zodiac first appears in Philo and Josephus; see A. Y. Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden, 1996), 131.

77 Foerster, "Zodiac in Ancient Synagogues," 231. Similarly Fine has suggested that the synagogue mosaic at Sepphoris should be interpreted primarily in relation to the liturgy; see "Liturgical Context," 229 (n. 61 above). For liturgical interpretations of the Dura Europos synagogue paintings, see C. H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos Conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters*, final report 8, pt. 1, *The Synagogue*, augmented ed. (New Haven, 1956), 92, 346.

78 "Representations of the Zodiac," 388; also see Weiss and Netzer, *Promise and Redemption*, 35 (n. 5 above).

79 *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (Boston, 1964), 15–16. T. F. Mathews has noted that the order of the narrative scenes in the vaulted zone below the dome are noncalendric. He has therefore suggested that they are a narrative set in the life of Christ. In addition Mathews has argued that the narrative scenes do not refer to specific places in the Holy Land. Instead the sanctuary of the church represented the entire Holy Land at once; see, *Art and Architecture in Byzantium and Armenia* (Brookfield, Vt., 1995), XII:15–17. Although Mathews has rejected the idea that these scenes depict a cycle of liturgical festivals, he concluded, "The narrative subjects also reinforce the liturgical action" (ibid., 17).

The parallels between the system of decoration in Middle Byzantine churches and the late fourth- to sixth-century synagogue mosaics discussed here are striking, because certain elements of the Middle Byzantine decorative system evolved centuries before its crystallization in the ninth century and later.[80] Few wall and ceiling mosaics of the Early Byzantine period have survived in the churches of the Christian East.[81] We know, however, that the dome and upper walls of the church of St. Sergios at Gaza were decorated with a monumental mosaic cycle representing the life of Christ in eighteen scenes. Although no physical remains survive, Chorikios's detailed description indicates that this church was built and decorated prior to 536.[82] Early Byzantine sources indicate that such decorative programs were not uncommon. For example, in the early fifth century, Neilos of Sinai advised a correspondent to "fill the holy church on both sides with pictures from the Old and the New Testaments, executed by an excellent painter."[83]

I propose that the arrangement of Helios and the zodiac cycle in ancient Palestinian synagogues functioned spatially in a manner analogous to the figured programs inside churches. One of the most striking and consistent features of Helios and the zodiac cycle is the placement of this composition in the center of the nave (see figs. 2–4). Why did these Jewish congregations place a circular design in the center of a rectilinear building covered by wooden beams that supported a pitched, tiled roof? As some scholars have noted, such circular compositions originated in ceiling decorations that were copied onto floors. Helios and the zodiac cycle therefore represent the celestial sphere or "Dome of Heaven."[84] Helios was conceived of as literally dominating the building from the top of the dome. His figure fills the circular medallion that corresponds with the large opening (*oculus*) in the center of domed structures, such as Hadrian's Pantheon or the octagonal room in Nero's Domus Aurea in Rome, through which the sun was visible. The octagonal room in the Domus Aurea might be the rotunda mentioned by Suetonius, which revolved around its own axis day and night, "just like the world."[85] Cosmic dome decoration originated in the ancient Near East. For example, the image of the Sasanid Persian king Khusrau surrounded by the heavenly luminaries (including the signs of the zodiac) decorated the dome of his throne room. In other words, the throne room of this king was designed as an earthly reflection of the heavenly hierarchy.[86] In Middle Byzantine churches, the figure of Christ Pantokrator occupies this space.[87] In the synagogue mosaics, the signs of the zodiac surround the image of Helios, and the figures of the four Seasons fill the "spandrels." The Temple imagery (that is, the panel with the Ark of the Tabernacle/Torah shrine flanked by menorahs and ritual objects) and the figured panels with biblical scenes were located in the "earthly zones" below the celestial sphere in the dome (see figs. 2–4).[88]

We do not know whether any Early Byzantine churches displayed the figure of Christ Pantokrator in the dome.[89] However, a Syriac hymn on Hagia Sophia, the cathedral church of Edessa, indicates that by the mid-sixth century Christians associated the central dome in a church with cosmology and mystical theology. As Kathleen McVey has noted, this hymn "provides the first literary evidence for the popularization of the notion of the 'dome of heaven' among Christians of the mid-sixth century."[90] The hymn describes the interior of the church as a place where "heaven and earth" meet, and explicitly compares the ceiling to the sky and the dome to the highest heaven: "Its ceiling is stretched out like the sky and without columns [it is] arched and simple, and it is also decorated with golden mosaic, as the firmament is with shining stars. And its

80 Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, 11, 45–50; also see F. Vitto, "The Interior Decoration of Palestinian Churches and Synagogues," in *Bosphorus: Essays in Honour of Cyril Mango*, ed. S. Efthymiadis, C. Rapp, and D. Tsougarakis (Amsterdam, 1995), 299. According to H. Maguire, *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (University Park, Pa., 1987), 83–84, the decorative programs of Early Byzantine churches were more varied than those of the post-Iconoclastic period.

81 Vitto, "Interior Decoration," 288–89. For Chorikios's description, see C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453* (Toronto, 1986), 60–68. Mango (ibid., 55) summarizes this description as follows: "St. Sergius' was a domed building with a square central bay, reduced by squinches to an octagon. The pictorial decoration was very elaborate: in the apse the Virgin Mary, attended by the patron saint and the founder of the church; in the vaults a lengthy New Testament cycle comprising at least twenty-four separate scenes, with particular emphasis on the miracles of Christ; in the drum of the dome the Prophets."

82 R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1979), 266. Talgam, "Similarities and Differences," 93–94 (n. 51 above), notes that whereas sacred themes and Jewish symbols decorate synagogue floors, the mosaics on the floors of churches generally have secular motifs. On the other hand, a law issued in 427 forbidding the placing of Christ's image on the ground is evidence that floor mosaics with his image must have existed; see M. Goodman, "The Jewish Image of God in Late Antiquity," in *Jewish Culture*, 145 (n. 17 above); Vitto, "Interior Decoration," 299. The vault mosaic of the sanctuary in the 6th-century church of San Vitale in Ravenna shows a lamb in the center of a starry sky. The mosaic in the vault of the mausoleum of Galla Placidia, also in Ravenna, depicts a cross in the center of a starry sky; see T. F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, N.J., 1993) 145–53. Mathews disagrees with the interpretation of the Dome of Heaven suggested by Lehmann; see ibid. and Mathews, *Art and Architecture*, XI (n. 79 above). For the identification of Helios as Sol Invictus see Levine, "Contextualizing Jewish Art," 103–15; Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:39–43 (both nn. 16–17 above). In an e-mail communication of 9 November 2000, Karen Britt pointed out to me parallels between the Helios and zodiac cycle in synagogues and the dome decoration of the Orthodox and Arian baptisteries in Ravenna. As Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, 155, has noted, these baptisteries "contain the best preserved Early Christian dome decoration" (dating to 458 and to the first half of the 6th century, respectively; see ibid., 132, 162). The scene of the baptism of Christ that occupies the "oculus" of both domes is encircled by the twelve apostles (perhaps paralleling the signs of the zodiac, which refer to the priestly courses). In the Orthodox baptistery, the zone immediately below this is decorated with ritual objects such as thrones, altars, and open books.

83 From Mathews, *Art and Architecture*, XII:15–16. Also see Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, 5 (n. 80 above).

84 See Roussin, "Zodiac in Synagogue Decoration," 84 (n. 12 above); Foerster, "Representations of the Zodiac," 380, 383 (n. 15 above). K. Lehmann noted in relation to the mosaic at Beth Alpha that "these heavenly floor mosaics more or less reflect ceiling decoration"; "The Dome of Heaven," *ArtB* 27 (1945): 9. H. P. L'Orange noted that in the ancient Near East, the cosmic kingdom of heaven was conceived as a circle divided into twelve zones. The earthly kingdom was believed to mirror the heavenly hierarchy; see *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA, 1953), 11–13.

85 See L'Orange, *Studies*, 28–29.

86 Ibid., 19–23.

87 Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, 17–21 (n. 79 above); Mathews, *Art and Architecture*, XII:17.

88 Other scholars have understood this decorative program as progressing forward from the bottom of the mosaic (that is, beginning at the entrance to the nave). See, for example, Roussin, "Zodiac in Synagogue Decoration," 93, who discusses this in relation to *Sepher Ha-Razim*: "The lowest level represents the earthly realm, the Helios-in-zodiac panel in the center represents the celestial sphere, and in the highest sphere is the Torah Shrine panel." Goodenough interpreted these panels as representing a progression from purgation, the first step in mysticism (e.g., the binding of Isaac), to the illumination of the heavens, the second step in mysticism (Helios and the zodiac cycle), to unification, the third stage of mysticism ("the implements of the revealed cult of Judaism"); see Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, abr. ed., 170–71 (n. 2 above). At the same time, the sequence of panels can also be understood in relation to the liturgy conducted within the synagogue, with the depiction of the Ark of the Tabernacle/Torah shrine in the mosaic in front of the actual Torah shrine, at the top of the nave.

89 Instead, the few dome or vault mosaics that have survived contain depictions of a lamb or cross, typically set against a starry sky; see M. F. Hansen, *The Eloquence of Appropriation: Prolegomena to an Understanding of Spolia in Early Christian Rome* (Rome, 2003), 148–50.

90 "The Domed Church as Microcosm: Literary Roots of an Architectural Symbol," *DOP* 37 (1983): 91.

lofty dome—behold, it resembles the highest heaven, and like a helmet it is firmly placed on its lower [part]."[91] The ceiling was decorated with gold mosaics that recalled the heavens, and the dome comprised a separate architectural element.[92] Thus the architectural features of the building were related to heaven, earth, and the sun, with the description proceeding hierarchically from the higher to the lower parts of the building. Eusebios's speech on the cathedral of Tyre indicates that by the fourth century Christians conceived of the interior of a church building as a temple and as an image of the cosmos.[93] Similarly, for Jews the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple was a representation of the Garden of Eden or Paradise, a place where heaven and earth were united.[94]

Helios and the zodiac cycle are part of a mosaic program that represented, in two dimensions, a three-dimensional view of the cosmos: Helios in the Dome of Heaven, above the earthly Temple (represented by the cultic furniture), sometimes accompanied by scenes of sacrifice or prayer. In my opinion, this program functioned in a manner analogous to that of the decorative schemes of contemporary Christian churches.[95] The Jewish-Christian struggle over the claim to the Temple was part of a larger debate over salvation and redemption. For Christians, Jesus was a substitute for the sacrifices offered in the Temple, and the means by which they were offered salvation and atonement for their sins. For this reason, iconography associated with Jesus, sacrifices, and salvation (such as lambs, peacocks, and symbols of the Eucharist) dominates early Christian imagery. Naturally these images also had liturgical significance, since participation in the church services provided worshippers the means to salvation.[96] Because Jews rejected Jesus as a substitute for the Temple sacrifices, Temple imagery and allusions to the Temple festivals were selected for the synagogue mosaics. For Jews, Jesus did not supersede or replace the Temple sacrifices, which would one day be reinstituted. In the interim, prayer in synagogues (not the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ) took the place of sacrifices. The prayers were directed to God (not Christ) in the heavens above.[97] Although the different interpretations proposed by Foerster and others are compelling, I believe that the underlying motivation for this decorative program is Temple oriented.[98] The association of Helios and the zodiac cycle with the sacrificial Temple cult may be one reason why this motif was not used in the decorative programs of contemporary Christian churches.[99]

Thomas Mathews has noted that the figure of Christ Pantokrator represented in the domes of Middle Byzantine churches holds the Gospel in his left hand and raises his right hand in a blessing. Christ is depicted as giving the world his law, the Gospel's *nova lex*.[100] The space under the dome (and in front of the chancel screen) was the area where part of the liturgy was performed and the worshipper encountered the divine.[101] The first half of this liturgy was an instruction in divine revelation. According to Mathews, "It is certainly significant that the invariable attribute of the Pantokrator is his Gospel book, for the solemn procession of the Gospel with candles and incense, the Little or First Entrance, is dramatically the high point of the first half of the liturgy, and it takes place directly beneath the dome. Furthermore, the reading of the Gospel that follows, which is the climax of the instruction, is performed by the deacon on the step before the bema underneath the dome."[102]

In contrast the Torah-reading ceremony was a central focus of the liturgy in late antique synagogues.[103] This ceremony had its origins in the period before the destruction of the Second Temple.[104] The prominent position given to the Ark of the Tabernacle/Torah shrine in synagogue mosaics (in the uppermost panel of the nave) may be understood in relation to the Christian claim that

91 Ibid., 95, str. 5–6.

92 Ibid., 99.

93 Ibid., 118; Finney, *Invisible God*, 290 (n. 56 above); Hansen, *Eloquence of Appropriation*, 200–201; R. Webb, "The Aesthetics of Sacred Space: Narrative, Metaphor, and Motion in *Ekphraseis* of Church Buildings," *DOP* 53 (1999): 66. However, whereas the Edessa hymn describes a domed structure, the church at Tyre was a basilica; McVey, "Domed Church," 118. Finney has even identified a visual hierarchy of images in the early Christian paintings on the walls and ceilings of the 3rd-century Callistus catacomb in Rome; see Finney, *Invisible God*, 198. See also n. 385, below.

94 Elior, *Three Temples*, 245, 248–49 (n. 10 above); on p. 37, she notes that in the ancient world temples were considered to be a microcosm of the universe and divine order.

95 See Kessler, "Sepphoris Mosaic," 72 (n. 60 above).

96 Ibid., 70, observes that "the difference between Jewish and Christian use of shared imagery is most emphatic in the representations of the Tabernacle. As Weiss and Netzer have argued, the Tabernacle and sacrifice at Sepphoris allude to God's promise of redemption and return, that is, to Jewish confidence that the Temple would be rebuilt. In the Christian chapels, the same symbols asserted the very opposite, the Christian belief that the Jewish liturgy of blood sacrifices had been superseded by Christ's crucifixion and the new sacrifice of the Eucharist." This is why the motifs used in synagogue mosaics contain a clear narrative element, whereas all historical references were eliminated in the decoration of early Christian churches; see ibid., 71. Also see Talgam, "Similarities and Differences," 103 (n. 51 above).

97 This may explain why sacrifice is rarely mentioned in the descriptions of the heavenly Temple that are so popular in apocalyptic literature; see M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York, 1993), 33.

98 The menorah became the preferred Jewish symbol because it evoked the Temple cult, the focus of Jewish salvation, as opposed to the Christian cross, which symbolized Jesus' sacrifice. For the menorah and the connection of some of the synagogue images with salvation, see Fine, *This Holy Place*, 117–20, 124 (n. 60 above); L. I. Levine, "The History and Significance of the Menorah in Antiquity," in *From Dura to Sepphoris*, 131–53 (n. 5 above). For this reason, by the 3rd or 4th century, menorahs framed within medallions were placed in the center of domed ceilings and arcosolia soffits in the Jewish catacombs in Rome; see Finney, *Invisible God*, 256–60, figs. 6.87–90 (n. 56 above). Weiss and Netzer, *Promise and Redemption* (n. 5 above); Weiss, "Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic" and "Talmudic Literature" (both n. 14 above), emphasizes the eschatological message of the theme of redemption; also see Talgam, "Similarities and Differences," 107–9 (n. 51 above). Weiss, "Talmudic Literature," 28–30, believes that the Sepphoris mosaic reflects Talmudic influence instead of sources within priestly circles. However, it is equally possible that this literature preserves the memory of the same traditions depicted in the mosaics (such as the blowing of trumpets during the daily sacrifice). Either way, in my opinion, the Sepphoris mosaic program is clearly Temple (and sacrifice) oriented. The menorah also symbolized the highly potent number seven, which, as Elior, *Three Temples*, 60 (n. 10 above), states, dictated "the span of time needed for the transition from chaos to Creation, from impurity to purity and from death to life."

99 Contrary to the opinion that attributed this to Christian opposition to astrology; see for example Mathews, *Art and Architecture*, XI:15. On the other hand, Christ was sometimes depicted as Sol Invictus, and sun and light were prominent elements in early Christianity; see Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 42–43 (n. 60 above); Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:41–42 (n. 16 above); L'Orange, *Studies*, 165 (n. 84 above). Although Helios and the zodiac cycle were not used in the decorative systems of churches, the cupola of the Church of Megale Panagia in Athens showed Christ Pantokrator surrounded by the heavenly lights and the signs of the zodiac; see ibid., 114: "Christ Pantocrator is pictured in the centre of the cupola and below him the nine orders of the heavenly hierarchy, below these again the firmament and the signs of the zodiac, and finally the orbit of the earth with all of the powers of nature."

100 L'Orange, *Studies*, 168.

101 Mathews, *Art and Architecture*, XII:17–18.

102 Ibid., XII:18.

103 See L. I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, 2000), 545.

104 Ibid., 506.

the Gospels (New Testament) superseded the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Christians believed that the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) could be understood only through the New Testament, in which its prophecies were fulfilled.[105] Thus, whereas the Gospels were one focus of the liturgy and iconography in churches, the Torah was given a prominent position in the decorative scheme and liturgy of synagogues. By modeling the Torah shrine in synagogues after the Ark of the Tabernacle, the Jews were not only laying claim to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as their own but were illustrating the authority of the ancient Jewish Law over the new Christian one.[106]

"Competitive Interpretation" in Literature

Christian attempts to appropriate the Jewish heritage are expressed in literary works as well as in art. The Edessa hymn cited above opens by describing the church building as a "Temple" (Syriac *haykla*) modeled after the Jewish Tabernacle: "Bezalel constructed the Tabernacle for us with the model he learned from Moses, and Amonidus and Asaph and Addai built a glorious temple for You in Urha."[107] McVey notes that early Christian writers and especially the Antiochene school emphasized the Tabernacle and other aspects of Jewish scripture and ceremonies, subordinating the Jewish antitype (Temple) to the Christian type (church).[108] Similarly, in his speech on the cathedral of Tyre, Eusebios called the bishop a "new Zerubbabel" and claimed that the church surpassed Solomon's Temple.[109]

The story of Joseph the Count (*comes*) provides further evidence for Jewish-Christian dialogues and disputes. This story is related by Epiphanios in the *Panarion*, a book about eighty heresies. Epiphanios, a native of Judea, claimed to have met Joseph when the latter was living in Skythopolis (Beth Shean) around 353. According to Epiphanios, Joseph told him his life's story, which Epiphanios wrote down about twenty years later, in 375. Joseph, originally a Jew, claimed to have been a close assistant of the patriarch (*nasi*) in Tiberias.[110] When this patriarch had himself secretly baptized on his deathbed, Joseph began years of confused exploration of the Christian faith.[111] During this period, Joseph had many adventures, including healing or exorcising a naked maniac and conducting magic contests with the Jews in Tiberias and at the baths at Hammath Gader.[112] Joseph finally converted to orthodox Christianity and was made a count by Constantine, who gave him money to build churches in Sepphoris, Tiberias, Capernaum, and Nazareth.[113]

Joseph's conversion prefigures and symbolizes the victory of the new Christian faith and churches in Galilee over the old Jewish religion and its patriarchate. Elhanan Reiner has also identified a magical theme in the Joseph story, which is reflected in the Jewish-Christian struggle over the efficacy of the divine names of God (YHWH) and Jesus. In several episodes in the Joseph story, the name of Christ proves to have the greater healing or magical power. For example, at one point Joseph cures a madman by making the sign of the cross and sprinkling holy water on him, invoking the name of Christ: "In the name of Jesus the Nazoraean who was crucified, come out of him, demon, and may he be healed."[114] Within an hour the man was cured of his madness. Reiner concludes that one of the points of this story is to show that the name of Jesus has replaced the name of the Jewish God as the one to invoke for the purposes of magic or healing.[115]

The Joseph story is composed of standard polemical motifs in the Jewish-Christian struggle, culminating with the Christian victory symbolized by Joseph's conversion and the construction of churches. Reiner argues that the

105 Hansen, *Eloquence of Appropriation*, 248 (n. 89 above). Horbury, *Jews and Christians*, 205 (n. 56 above), notes that "one object of anti-Jewish controversy is to justify separate Christian existence, and above all the Christian claim to the Jewish scriptures." However, "the rabbinic documents together with the Hebrew Bible make up a single unity, just as for the Christians the two Testaments form one seamless robe. Jews and Christians therefore shared the same Bible only in appearance, because in each tradition it was united with another distinctive and very highly esteemed body of material" (ibid., 212).

106 According to the Jews, the Torah had been given by God, whereas Paul claimed that it had been superseded and its observance was no longer necessary; see A. F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden, 1977), 211.

107 McVey, "Domed Church," 95 (n. 90 above).

108 Ibid., 110–11.

109 Hansen, *Eloquence of Appropriation*, 230–31, with references.

110 See S. Goranson, "Joseph of Tiberias Revisited: Orthodoxies and Heresies in Fourth-Century Galilee," in *Galilee through the Centuries*, 336 (n. 59 above).

111 See Jacobs, "Visible Ghosts," 321 (n. 59 above).

112 See Goranson, "Joseph of Tiberias," 339.

113 Ibid., 338.

114 Epiphanios, *Panarion*, Ebionites, 30.10.4; trans. P. R. Amidon, *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis: Selected Passages* (New York, 1990), 99.

115 Similarly, the cross and the menorah were used as magical talismans and not as spiritual symbols; see E. Reiner, "Joseph the *Comes* of Tiberias and the Jewish-Christian Dialogue in Galilee in the Fourth Century," in *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem, 2004), 355–86 (in Hebrew). For the simultaneous use of both symbols by Jews and Christians, see J. E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford, 1993), 39–41.

figures in this story are typological and therefore not necessarily historical. These same themes appear in the *Toldot Jeshu*, a Jewish version of the Gospels that dates probably to the fifth century.[116] This work attempts to show that Jesus could not be the messiah because he not only was not descended from David but was illegitimate. In contrast the Jewish patriarchs claimed descent from the House of David. In addition, according to the *Toldot Jeshu*, although Jesus did heal and work miracles, he succeeded only because he stole the divine name from the Rock of the Foundation in Jerusalem. These works indicate that the divine name was one of the points of contention between Jews and Christians.[117] Rabbinic literature contains references to the invocation of the name of Jesus for magical or healing purposes, as we shall see.[118] This struggle is also reflected in the visual arts, as Mathews has noted: "The images of Christ's miracles were part of an ongoing war against non-Christian magic.... Indeed, it can be said that magic provides the first coherent theme of Christian art."[119] Daniel Boyarin has observed that Judaism and Christianity were closely intertwined and continued to quarrel with each other like siblings well into late antiquity.[120]

The Jewish Priestly Class and the Solar Calendar

The Priests and the Rabbis

The rise of monumental synagogue architecture and art in Palestine also seems to be connected with the strengthening or reemergence of the Jewish priestly class, a phenomenon that may parallel the emergence of Christianity and its clergy.[121] Lee Levine has noted that "many, if not most, priests continued to remain a separate and distinct entity throughout late antiquity. Organized into twenty-four priestly courses scattered throughout Judaea for centuries prior to the loss of Jerusalem, they appear to have retained this framework even afterward."[122] Steven Fraade describes as "simplistic" the assumption that the priesthood lost all of its prerogatives and influence after the destruction of the Temple.[123] During the fourth and fifth centuries, the priestly class became increasingly prominent, filling the void left by the abolition of the patriarchate after circa 425.[124]

A number of scholars have pointed to the tension that existed between the priestly class and the rabbis, whose main institution was the *beth midrash* (study house). The sages apparently exercised little influence over and had limited

116 See S. Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach Jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin, 1902), 246. For a more recent (but unpublished) study, see W. Horbury, "A Critical Examination of the *Toledoth Jeshu*" (PhD diss., Cambridge, 1970). Horbury notes that "the outspoken Jewish polemic in the Toledoth Jeshu appears to presuppose the importance gained by Tiberias under the Jewish patriarchs," although some passages preserve Jewish anti-Christian traditions of the 2nd and 3rd centuries; see Horbury, *Jews and Christians*, 203–4 (n. 56 above).

117 Reiner, "Joseph the *Comes*," 366–71. Also see Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 33–43 (n. 3 above), for the use of the divine name in the writings of Origen and Dionysios the Areopagite. For a discussion of the attitudes of these and other early Christian writers toward figured images, see M. Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York, 1992). For other examples of literary works reflecting a polemical struggle between Jews and Christians in the 3rd and 4th centuries, see D. J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen, 1988), 352–53.

118 See Taylor, *Christians and Holy Places*, 29.

119 Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, 66 (n. 82 above); also see p. 86. Moses and Daniel were popular figures in early Christian art because they prefigured Jesus and the miracles he performed; see ibid., 72–77. For a critique of Mathews, see P. Brown's review in *ArtB* 77 (1995): 499–502. The classic work on Jesus as a miracle-worker is M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco, 1978).

120 Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 5 (n. 6 above). Boyarin qualifies this by focusing on *rabbinic* Judaism and *orthodox* Christianity (ibid., 11), excluding from consideration other movements in Judaism and Christianity except for Jewish-Christianity. For a 6th-century Syriac source featuring a Christian who describes himself as a Jew, see ibid., 22–23.

121 See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 500 (n. 103 above); O. Irshai, "The Byzantine Period," in *Israel: Land, People, State: A Nation and Its Homeland*, ed. A. Shin'an (Jerusalem, 1998), 115 (in Hebrew). Perhaps the priestly class gained renewed prominence not only because of the rise of a church hierarchy but because of the Jewish need to counter the Christian claim that Jesus was the substitute for the Temple sacrifices. Alternatively the rise of a church hierarchy including priests might represent the Christian attempt to appropriate yet another aspect of the Jewish tradition.

122 *Ancient Synagogue*, 492.

123 "Priests, Kings, and Patriarchs: Yerushalmi Sanhedrin in its Exegetical and Cultural Settings," in *Talmud Yerushalmi*, 3:332 n. 53 (n. 8 above). Also see idem, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany, 1991), 73: "In fact, several kinds of evidence suggest that priestly status, and perhaps authority, continued to be a factor in Jewish communal life long after 70 CE."

124 Irshai, "Byzantine Period," 115–16; J. Yahalom, *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* (Tel Aviv, 1999), 113 (in Hebrew); idem, "The Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic and Its Story," in *From Dura to Sepphoris*, 90 (n. 5 above).

involvement in ancient Palestinian synagogues.[125] Whereas other functionaries in ancient synagogues including priests are mentioned by the church fathers and in the Theodosian Code, sages are not.[126] Priests are also mentioned as donors in synagogue inscriptions from Na'aran, Eshtamoa, Khirbet Susiya, and Sepphoris.[127] This evidence suggests that priests were involved in (and perhaps exercised some control over?) ancient Palestinian synagogues, as opposed to the sages, who were apparently involved mainly as teachers, preachers, and adjudicants of halakhic matters (questions regarding the interpretation of Jewish law).[128] As Leonard Rutgers has observed, "in Late Roman and Byzantine Palestine, descendants of priests continued to make a mark on society in general and on the synagogue in particular."[129] Paul Flesher has recently argued that priests continued to provide religious leadership after 70, citing Pentateuchal Targums which he attributes to priestly circles as evidence that priests provided religious leadership in ancient Palestinian synagogues.[130]

125 For discussions see P. V. M. Flesher, "The Literary Legacy of the Priests? The Pentateuchal Targums of Israel in their Social and Linguistic Context," in *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins until 200 CE, Papers Presented at an International Conference at Lund University, October 14–17, 2001*, ed. B. Olsson and M. Zetterholm (Stockholm, 2003), 467; L. I. Levine, "The Sages and the Synagogue in Late Antiquity," in *Galilee in Late Antiquity*, 201–22 (n. 7 above); Yahalom, "Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," 89; idem, *Poetry and Society*, 111–13; Fine, *This Holy Place*, 57–58 (n. 60 above); Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 13, 124, 238, 248 (n. 51 above). For the sages, the sanctity of the *beth midrash* was greater than that of the synagogue; see ibid., 68–69; J. M. Baumgarten, "Art in the Synagogue: Some Talmudic Views," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists*, 79 (n. 51 above). According to Levine, "Sages and Synagogue," 203, "The primary social, intellectual, and religious setting of the rabbis in late antiquity was the *bet midrash*"). Elior, *Three Temples*, 14 (n. 10 above), notes that the *beth midrash* does not preserve any priestly traditions and does not give the priests preferential treatment. For more on the tensions between the priests and sages, see M. D. Swartz, "Sage, Priest, and Poet: Typologies of Religious Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists*, 104–9; Irshai, "Byzantine Period," 115 (n. 121 above); Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, 92 (n. 123 above): "The rabbinic sages claimed... roles that were formerly assigned to the priesthood," and 118: "the implicit argument [by the rabbis] that Torah study is the superior successor to the Temple rites." I. Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), 140–42, has noted that we "find in early Tannaitic literature traces of a tendency to disentangle the halakhic tradition from its strong ties with priestly circles.... There are good reasons to believe that the rise of rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple was in one way or another linked to an anti-priestly ideology." Also see L. I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1989), 171: "It is quite probable that one group within the Galilean aristocracy with which the sages came into conflict was the priestly families," and p. 172: "Rabbinic literature tends either to ignore the priests and everything related to them, or to refer to them disparagingly." However, Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 492 (n. 103 above), notes that "priests were amply represented among the sages throughout much of the talmudic period." Also see Miller, "Cantankerous Sepphoreans," 559 (n. 5 above).

126 Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 443. On the other hand, Levine (ibid., 495) has noted that no priests are named among the many synagogue officials mentioned in edicts from the end of the 4th century (in contrast to the situation among the Samaritans).

127 Fine, *This Holy Place*, 88 (n. 60 above); Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 494.

128 Levine, "Sages and Synagogue," 208–11 (n. 125 above); idem, "Contextualizing Jewish Art," 125–26 (n. 17 above); Schwartz, "Rabbinization," 60 (n. 8 above). Also see Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 218–19 (n. 7 above): "However, there is mounting evidence that ancient synagogues functioned as autonomous institutions from the rabbinic academies and resisted the rabbis' attempts to regulate their activities." On the other hand, although priests could (and sometimes did) hold positions of leadership in ancient synagogues, most identified synagogue leaders were laypeople; see Flesher, "Literary Legacy," 484 (n. 125 above).

129 "Incense Shovels at Sepphoris?" in *Galilee through the Centuries*, 196 (n. 60 above). According to Rutgers (ibid., 196), in the Diaspora priests were not a force to reckon with. Also see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 499: "The importance of the priests themselves for the recitation of these blessings is preserved in Palestinian practice, but not in Babylonian." I disagree with Rutgers and Levine about the status of priests in the Diaspora.

130 "Literary Legacy," 468–69.

The issue of rabbinic involvement in synagogues raises the question of the relevance of rabbinic sources to discussions of ancient synagogue art. The tannaitic and amoraic sources often cited by scholars in relation to ancient Palestinian synagogues antedate most if not all of the buildings decorated with Helios and the zodiac cycle.[131] Levine has noted the problem of using chronologically or geographically disparate rabbinic sources for the study of ancient synagogues.[132] In addition, the interpretation of many passages and their relevance to synagogue buildings are disputed. The Jerusalem Talmud (which was completed by the early fifth century) and later aggadic midrashim (rabbinic exegeses of scripture without a halakhic or legal basis) are "infinitely richer" in material relating to synagogues than second-century tannaitic sources.[133] At the same time, the application of Temple terminology and forms to synagogues increased dramatically.[134] Similarly, the centrality of prayer within the synagogue was expanded during the Amoraic period (ca. 200–500), when prayer became equal in significance to Torah study.[135]

Piyyutim and the Priestly Courses

The application of Temple terminology and forms to synagogues is expressed in various ways, including their conceptualization as "small temples," with furniture recalling that of the Temple (including the Torah shrine cast in the mold of the Ark of the Covenant, the menorahs, and the incense shovels).[136] It is also evident in the increased use of Temple themes in liturgical contexts, perhaps best expressed by the appearance of piyyutim.[137] In fact, the earliest *paytan* (liturgical poet) known to us by name is Yose ben Yose, a priest who was active in the fifth century.[138] Priestly themes are prominent in the collections of piyyutim that follow the order of the weekly scripture readings. Piyyutim that were recited on the Sabbath and on festival mornings were called *qerovot*, from the language of sacrifice.[139] Fine has noted that the paytan took on the role of the priest offering the "sacrifice" on behalf of the community through his recitation.[140] It is therefore not surprising that some of the paytanim known from late antiquity are priests.[141] The fact that many piyyutim deal with Temple issues and the priestly courses may be due in part to the priestly lineage of these paytanim.[142] The impetus for composing such poetry might have come from

131 The Tannaim are sages who lived up to the time of the compilation of the Mishnah (ca. 200), while the Amoraim are sages who lived after the compilation of the Mishnah. Scholars place the Tannaitic sages roughly within the period from the 1st to the early 3rd century and the Palestinian amoraim from the early 3rd to the mid-to-late 4th century; see H. L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. M. Bockmuehl (Minneapolis, 1992), 72–105. The dating and historicity of individual traditions and sages are highly problematic and subjects of much debate.

132 *Ancient Synagogue*, 567.

133 Levine, "Sages and Synagogue," 208 (n. 125 above), although rabbinic involvement in synagogue activities still appears sporadic and limited in scope. For the "synagogization" of the Temple in post-Amoraic sources, see Fine, *This Holy Place*, 88 (n. 60 above).

134 Fine, *This Holy Place*, 81–82, 93; Talgam, "Similarities and Differences," 105 (n. 51 above).

135 Fine, *This Holy Place*, 85.

136 Ibid., 79–87; on p. 92 he notes that, "While the Tannaim were concerned that synagogues could become too much like the Temple, the Amoraim and those who followed them were not."

137 Ibid., 87.

138 Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 65 (n. 124 above); Levine, "Contextualizing Jewish Art," 127 (n. 17 above).

139 Fine, *This Holy Place*, 88. The following passage from the *qerovah* of Yannai for Num. 8 is a good example (from Schwartz, "Program and Reception," 179 [n. 5 above]):

[The heavenly bodies (identified here with the angels)] arise at night / to declare Your faith by night / trembling like slaves before You / those who are made according to Your plan / who run alongside the wheels of Your chariot / who face the surfaces of Your throne / but see not the likeness of Your face / but rather the luster of the light of Your face / surrounded by snow and fire / and its wheels [of the divine chariot] are burning fire / and a river of fire is drawn out before it / from which they [the angels / heavenly bodies] are created / and through which they pass / but their light avails You not / for it was You who lit the lamps / You who make the lights / who create the heavenly bodies / who bring forth the constellations / who spread out the stars / who light the light of the sun / who cause to shine the luster of the moon / which runs to the light of the sun / who cause the sun to shine / and Mercury to scintillate / who set Venus in its place / who correct the moon-star / who illuminate the light of Jupiter / who enrich the splendor of Saturn / who make red the light of Mars / and all of these are lamps in the heavens / and You wished to light lamps on earth / like...the appearance of the tent of heaven / was made the likeness...[of the Temple?].

The images decorating the interiors of churches and synagogues were not only used as "propaganda" tools and accompanied the liturgy but served to educate the illiterate members of the congregation. Thus, although few contemporary Jews could understand the piyyutim, which were composed in an obscure and allusive style, the images evoked in the poems were illustrated in the mosaics; see ibid., 177.

140 *This Holy Place*, 88. Also see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 552 (n. 103 above); Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 64–92.

141 Irshai, "Byzantine Period," 117 (n. 121 above).

142 Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 499–500; Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 108; Irshai, "Byzantine Period," 117.

priestly circles wishing to maintain the memory of the Temple and, indirectly, enhance their own standing in the community.[143] Some scholars have suggested that the rise of piyyutim also reflects the influence of the Christian liturgy.[144]

The recurring motif of the priestly courses in piyyutim and in synagogue inscriptions points to the rise or reemergence of the priestly class, many of whom seem to have lived in Galilee after the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–35).[145] The priests were divided into twenty-four courses, which were designated by the names of the heads of the priestly families enumerated in 1 Chronicles 24:7–18. The division into courses enabled all of the priests to participate in the Temple service, as each course would take its weekly turn officiating.[146] Numerous piyyutim list the twenty-four courses and refer to their homes in Galilee. Many seem to have been concentrated in the Beit Netofa Valley in Lower Galilee and in the Tiberias area, although priests lived in other parts of Palestine as well.[147] Synagogue inscriptions listing the courses have been discovered at Caesarea, Ashkelon, Rehov, and in the area of Nazareth.[148] The plaques listing the priestly courses affixed to the walls of synagogues and the references to the courses in piyyutim reflect the prominence of priests within the liturgical setting of the synagogue.[149]

The Priestly Courses and the Solar Calendar

In his discussion of the Caesarea inscription, Michael Avi-Yonah noted that the priestly courses are one of the central themes of the piyyutim composed by Palestinian paytanim.[150] The priestly courses were also connected with the calendar, since each served twice a year in the Temple for a total of forty-eight courses. Avi-Yonah noted that this connection is attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls, not surprising in light of the priestly orientation of the sect. The sectarians used a 364-day solar calendar consisting of fifty-two weeks per year.[151] According to Rachel Elior, "The priestly courses were the living ritual expression of commemorating the pre-calculated, 364-day calendar."[152] The Qumran literature shows that the solar calendar could be used to determine the cycles of service of the priestly courses in sevenfold cycles of sabbatical years and jubilees.[153] Avi-Yonah concluded that the zodiac cycle in synagogue mosaics referred to the priestly courses and the calendar year.[154] If Avi-Yonah and Elior are correct, then like many of the piyyutim, the zodiac cycle refers to the priestly courses and, by way of extension, the service in the Jerusalem Temple.[155] In fact, the signs of the zodiac are a theme of some piyyutim.[156]

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the word *hodesh* apparently designates the beginning of the month.[157] This term seems to correspond with the signs of the zodiac in the synagogue mosaics, whereas the four seasons (*tekufot*) indicate the cardinal points of the year and the seasons dependent on them. In the scrolls, these terms apparently derive from an ancient priestly calendar used for liturgical ceremonies that was preserved and preferred by the sectarians.[158] James VanderKam's discussion of calendrical scrolls from Qumran highlights the priestly interests in the Temple cult that are common to these scrolls and the zodiac cycle in synagogues.

The solar calendar is the one according to which the religious holidays are dated, and dating sacred festivals is one of the central uses to which the calendar was applied. Not only is the expanded list of holidays coordinated with the 364-day system; the priestly courses are also an integral part of the calendar documents. By incorporating the dates of sabbaths and festivals and the periods of service for the priestly courses into their system for measuring time, the cultic and theological concerns of the

143 Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 555; Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 112. Many piyyutim also feature angels, a characteristic feature of literature associated with the Zadokite priestly tradition; see Elior, *Three Temples*, 218 (n. 10 above). In contrast Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 199 (n. 51 above), describes piyyutim as "self-consciously and even polemically rabbinic"; and p. 263: "The *piyyut* offers unambiguous evidence for the rabbinization of liturgical practice in sixth century Palestine."

144 See Irshai, "Byzantine Period," 117; Schwartz, "Program and Reception," 176 (n. 5 above): "This development may be seen as the institutionalization, perhaps under the impact of a similar development among Christians, of the practice of liturgical improvisation that prevailed in some Palestinian synagogues." Schwartz also notes the striking formal resemblance of some piyyutim to the *kontakion*, a type of Christian liturgical poetry written in Greek and introduced at the same time as piyyutim; see ibid., 177, and idem, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 199, 266. Similarly, Horbury, *Jews and Christians*, 220 (n. 56 above), has noted parallels between piyyutim on the one hand, and Syriac and Greek Christian hymnology on the other hand. Also see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 530, 553; although on p. 426, he points out that "this pattern of locally based authority (in synagogues) is somewhat similar to that found in pagan life and stands in contrast to that typical of Christianity, where the concentration of power in a dominant ecclesiastical framework tended to homogenize patterns of leadership."

145 Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 107; S. S. Miller, *Studies in the History and Traditions of Sepphoris* (Leiden, 1984), 131. Yahalom refers to a hellenized, intellectual "priestly elite," whose center was in Sepphoris; see Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 110, 113, and idem, "Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," 90 (both n. 124 above).

146 See Miller, *Studies*, 62 n. 1. Elior, *Three Temples*, 43 (n. 10 above), notes that each course was replaced by its successor on the morning of the Sunday of the new week, to prevent any desecration of the Sabbath. In contrast, rabbinic tradition decreed that the rotation should take place on the Sabbath. The rabbis prescribed drawing lots instead of using a fixed order of service.

147 Irshai, "Byzantine Period," 116 (n. 121 above), notes that, despite questions regarding the historical accuracy of the locations listed, the courses attest to the strengthening of the priestly class, especially in Galilee. Also see Flesher, "Literary Legacy," 486 (n. 125 above): "Galilee's catastrophe did not begin until the mid-second century, when the banishment of all Jews from Judea caused thousands of them to migrate north. Among the migrants were large numbers of priests. While many priests probably moved with only their immediate families to whatever villages would give them welcome, every priestly *mishmarah* had families that moved and settled together."

148 Fine, *This Holy Place*, 88 (n. 60 above). Also see M. Avi-Yonah, "The Caesarea Inscription of the Twenty-Four Priestly Courses," in *The Teacher's Yoke: Studies in Memory of Henry Trantham*, ed. E. J. Vardamann and J. L. Garrett, Jr. (Waco, 1964), 53: "When the persecution [instituted by Hadrian] came to an end (ca. AD 140) the Jewish remnant was reorganized in Galilee; the survivors of the priestly courses were transferred there and settled in various towns and villages, from 'Aithalu in the north to Beth-Yerah in the south." There is a possible plaque from Kissufim, and the longest and most complete fragment comes from Yemen; see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 496.

149 The liturgy of the synagogue service often highlighted elements of earlier Temple worship with which priests were identified; see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 496; Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 108 (n. 124 above); Irshai, "Byzantine Period," 116 (n. 121 above).

150 "Caesarea Inscription," 50, 53–54; on p. 50, he states, "it is a fact that the poets who composed the *qeroboth* (liturgical poems) dealing with the 24 courses were all connected with the land of Israel. This confirms the assumption that this custom originated in a country where the memory of the priestly villages was kept alive from local topographical knowledge."

151 Ibid., 55. See J. C. VanderKam, "Calendrical Texts and the Origins of the Dead Sea Scroll Community," in *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects*, ed. M. O. Wise et al. (New York, 1994), 376, for evidence that at Qumran the 364-day calendar lies behind the periods of service for the priestly groups. For recent discussions of the Qumran calendar, see U. Glessmer, "Calendars in the Qumran Scrolls," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, ed. P. W. Flint and J. C. VanderKam (Leiden, 1999), 2:227, 240–52, who refers to it as a 364-day calendar tradition, instead of as a solar calendar; J. C. VanderKam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Measuring Time* (New York, 1998); R. T. Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian. Biblical, Intertestamental and Patristic Studies* (Leiden, 1996); VanderKam, "Calendrical Texts." Also see A. Regev, "Abominated Temple and a Holy Community: The Formation of the Notions of Purity and Impurity in Qumran," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10.2 (2003): 254, who notes that the author(s) of 4QMMT expected the addressee of this letter to adopt the solar calendar.

152 E-mail communication, 29 April 2003.

153 Elior, *Three Temples*, 42–45 (n. 10 above).

154 "Caesearea Inscription," 56 (n. 148 above): "It seems that in view of the presence of the list of priestly courses and of the zodiac in synagogues, both connected with each other and with the months in the liturgical poems referred to, the zodiac panels should be seen as references to the *calendar* as well. Each sign of the zodiac represents one of the twelve months of the year; the list of priestly courses divides the year into weeks; together they form a complete set of chronological indications." Also see Vitto, "Interior Decoration," 295 (n. 80 above): "The painted inscriptions containing the names of the months and the list of the 'twenty-four priestly courses' [at Rehov] may correspond to the zodiac on the mosaic floors [of other synagogues]."

155 In contrast to Roussin, "Zodiac in Synagogue Decoration," 89 (n. 12 above), who argues that "the fact that in most of the preserved zodiac pavements most of the seasons and months do not correspond also makes calendrical interpretation unlikely." However, Talgam, "Similarities and Differences," 104 (n. 51 above), supports the idea that the Helios and zodiac cycle "served both as a zodiac and a calendar."

156 For examples see Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 270–72 (n. 51 above), although he connects the piyyutim with rabbinic Judaism.

157 Not the new moon; see VanderKam, *Calendars*, 111 (n. 151 above), "for the Qumran calendars it is the full moon that marks the inception of the new month."

158 Glessmer, "Calendars," 2:226, 230, 232 (n. 151 above); VanderKam, *Calendars*, 116; Elior, "The Jewish Calendar and Mystic Time," in *The Hebrew Calendar*, by U. Simon and R. Elior (Jerusalem, 1995), 30–33. For a different opinion, see Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology*, 101–13 (n. 151 above). For calendars of priestly courses from Qumran, see G. Vermes, ed. and trans., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York, 1997), 335–62; Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology*, 151; VanderKam, "Calendrical Texts," 380 (n. 151 above).

authors come to expression. The calendars are, with few exceptions, oriented towards worship. In the case of the priestly divisions, it seems as if the covenanters worked with this institution because they anticipated a return to the Jerusalem sanctuary and to service it according to what they believed was the divine will. The group seemed to have been confident that their exile from the temple was only temporary. The calendars, with their unalterable rhythms, also expressed the theological or philosophical conviction that the courses of the luminaries and the cycles of festivals and priestly duties operated in a cosmic harmony imposed upon them by the creator God himself. The liturgical and theological emphases of the Qumran calendars betray a heavy influence from priests and priestly traditions.[159]

The literature of the Qumran community indicates that they considered the sun to be the source of light/good, as opposed to darkness/evil. A Qumran scroll called *A Liturgical Work* (4Q392 Frag. 1) proclaims that "He created darkness [and l]ight is His, and in His dwelling is the most perfect light, and all gloominess ceases before Him. It is not for Himself the distinction between light and darkness, for He has distinguished them for the sons of man: light during the day by means of the sun; (and during the) night (by means of) moon and stars."[160] This sort of outlook might have given Josephus the impression that the Essenes offered prayers to the sun.[161] The emphasis on light and the heavenly bodies in the passage from 4Q392 recalls the synagogue mosaics, where Helios is flanked by the moon and stars (that is, the heavenly bodies that provide light at night).[162] In the solar calendar of Qumran, the year (and hence, creation) began on Wednesday instead of Sunday. The rationalization was that the heavenly luminaries were not placed in the sky until the fourth day of the week.[163]

Elior has explored the connections among the Qumran literature, the priests of the Second Temple period, and later hekhalot literature. She notes that "a large proportion of the literary works discovered in the Judean Desert bears a distinctly priestly stamp; it refers explicitly to the Zadokite priests and deals in detail with questions germane to the Temple, the sacred service and the ritual calendar of Sabbaths and festivals."[164] She associates this literature, which includes apocryphal, pseudepigraphic, and apocalyptic works, with the Zadokite priests who served in the Temple until they were displaced by the Hasmonean priesthood in the middle of the second century BCE.[165] Elior believes that there is an "uninterrupted line" connecting this literature with later hekhalot texts.[166]

159 "Calendrical Texts," 112. Also see M. Albani, quoted in VanderKam, *Calendars*, 74: "The basic idea of the calendrical arrangement represented in the 4QMishmarot texts is the concept of a correspondence between heaven and earth, according to which the circuits of the stars and the cycles of the priestly courses have a common origin. This universalizing of the temple cult to the farthest horizon of the creation naturally could have sprung only from the theological interests of priestly circles." Elior, "Jewish Calendar," 29, has noted that the solar calendar was probably preferred over the lunar calendar by the sectarians because it was possible to determine in advance the dates of festivals (such as Shavuot) that are not otherwise set by the Torah.

160 Translation from Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 399; also see F. García Martínez and E. J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, 2000), 2:788–89. Other examples: "And when the sun rises...the firmament of heaven, they shall bless" (Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 370); "who hast created the morning as a sign to reveal the dominion of the light as the boundary of the daytime.... For the light is good." (ibid., 373). Other writings found at Qumran, such as 1 Enoch and the book of Jubilees, attest to the connection between the sun and the calendar; see Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology*, 136 (n. 151 above). For example, see Jubilees 2:9: "And God appointed the sun to be a great sign on the earth for days and for Sabbaths and for months and for feasts and for years and for weeks of years and for jubilees and for all seasons of the years."

161 *Bellum iudaicum* 2.128–29.

162 VanderKam, "Calendrical Texts," 382 (n. 151 above), has suggested that the term *duk* mentioned in the *mishmarot* texts from Qumran denotes a moon that is near the new crescent. Could this be the crescent moon flanking the figure of Helios in the synagogue mosaics (which can be seen at Hammath Tiberias, Sepphoris, and Beth Alpha)?

163 Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology*, 103; Elior, *Three Temples*, 104 (n. 10 above).

164 *Three Temples*, 7. On p. 20 she notes that the finds from Qumran have established previously unknown links between apocryphal, pseudepigraphic, and apocalyptic literature.

165 Ibid., 7.

166 Ibid., ix. At the same time, Elior cautions that we cannot identify the authors of *merkavah* literature or date the stages of composition. Instead, she says, "My contention is that these diverse stages seem to share a common religious infrastructure, a distinct, priestly-oriented, cultural identity" (ibid., 260).

The use of the solar calendar is an important feature of earlier apocalyptic and Qumran literature and the hekhalot texts. Elior connects the solar calendar with the *merkavah* tradition (see below) because the chariot-throne of God (merkavah) was conceptualized as having four faces oriented toward the cardinal points. The merkavah tradition unites time and space in a cyclic cosmic order. This order was based on an axis that unifies the fourfold cycles of seasons in nature and other multiples and derivatives of four in fixed proportions to the twelve months of the year (including the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twenty-four hours in a day, the twenty-four priestly courses, and the forty-eight constellations). The order of cyclic ritual time was measured in Sabbaths of days, that is, in weeks, deriving from the seven days of creation. The axis of sacred space was embodied in seven firmaments and seven *hekhalot* (heavenly temples).[167] Divine order, based on the numbers seven, four, and twelve, was represented by the solar calendar.[168] Each year was divided into 364 days, fifty-two Sabbaths, and four equal ninety-one-day-long quarters (the seasons), each consisting of thirteen Sabbaths. This cyclic and cosmic order was preordained by God and preserved by the priests and angels. The rituals connected with the maintenance of this order were performed in the sacred service by priests in the earthly Temple and by angels in the heavenly Temple.[169] Elior believes it is "plausible" that the solar calendar was used in the Temple by the pre-Hasmonean Zadokite priests.[170] One of the points of contention between the descendants of the dispossessed Zadokite priests and the rabbis concerned the rabbinic preference for a lunar calendar.[171] Advocates of the solar calendar considered the 354-day lunar calendar to be false and sinful because it was based on fallible human observation instead of the fixed, divinely decreed, solar calendar.[172] They associated the lunar calendar with chaos, evil, sin, and impurity, as opposed to the cyclical ritual order imposed by observance of the solar calendar, which expressed the perfection of God's creation.[173]

In the Sepphoris mosaic, each zodiacal sign is labeled in Hebrew with its name and the name of the corresponding month (fig. 5). A similar association can be seen in the inscription in the floor of the synagogue at Ein Gedi, where the twelve signs of the zodiac are followed by the twelve Hebrew months (fig. 6).[174] Additional evidence for this connection is provided by Revelation 22:2, where a tree of life is described that bears twelve kinds of fruit, one in each month. Each of the signs of the zodiac is related to one of the twelve months of the year.[175] The figure of Helios thus represents the sun in the center of the universe, and together with the zodiac cycle alludes to the solar calendar and divinely decreed, ritual order.

167 Ibid., 30–31. Also see H. Odeberg, ed. and trans., *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (New York, 1973), 156.

168 Elior, *Three Temples*, 95.

169 Ibid., 31.

170 Ibid., 85. In contrast Sacha Stern argues that the inconsistencies in dates created by their use indicate that the solar calendars of the books of Enoch, Jubilees, and other Qumran texts were never widely observed, and that these calendars would have been followed only by marginal, sectarian groups. They were therefore schematic or idealized models instead of functioning calendars; see S. Stern, *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar, Second Century BCE–Tenth Century CE* (New York, 2001), 4, 16. Stern (ibid., 11) also believes that the polemical tone of Jubilees indicates that by the time this work was written, the lunar calendar must have been widely used by the Jewish population. For a mild critique of Stern's book, see the review by J. M. Baumgarten in *AJS Review* 27.2 (2003): 318–19.

171 Stern, *Calendar and Community*, 97–98, 152, has noted that 4th and 5th century Jewish funerary inscriptions from Zoar (es-Safi), at the southeastern end of the Dead Sea employ a calendar that varies with the Palestinian rabbinic calendar (although it is not a solar calendar). This "challenges the common assumption that by the later Roman period, the rabbis and rabbinic Judaism had become the dominant force in Jewish Palestinian society" (ibid., 97). Instead, calendrical diversity persisted among the Jewish communities of Palestine at least until the 6th century.

172 Elior, *Three Temples*, 44, 57; for rabbinic passages reflecting this disagreement, see ibid., 108–9. The disagreement over calendars also affected the service of the priests in the Temple, as she notes on p. 53: "The division into Sabbaths was the basis for the division of twenty-four priestly courses, which served in the Temple twice a year in six-year cycles: each of the twenty-four courses served thirteen times in six years."

173 Ibid., 114–19; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 10. One of the consequences of the use of a solar calendar is divine preordination and predeterminism, a principle that the rabbis rejected; see Elior, *Three Temples*, 223.

174 In contrast, in an unpublished paper, Christopher Beall argues that "the assumed connection between the list of the zodiac and months at ʿEn Gedi and the Helios mosaics may be incorrect." He believes that the inscription acts as a magical, binding spell to prevent the villagers from transgressing the rules of the town (for further discussion of this inscription, see below). I am grateful to Beall for providing me with a copy of his paper and for his permission to cite it here.

175 Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 134 (n. 76 above).

The zodiac cycle in mosaic floors was not used to calculate calendrical dates but instead evoked the solar calendar, just as the other images in the mosaics seem to have evoked the Temple cult.[176] The gabled structure flanked by menorahs in the uppermost panel of these mosaics is usually understood as representing the Torah shrine in synagogues. However, the Torah shrine itself, and the ritual objects surrounding it—including the menorahs, lulav and ethrog (the bundle of branches and citron used in the festival of Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles), shofar (the ram's horn), and certainly the incense shovel—were apparently modeled after or intended to recall the festivals and daily sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple (see figs. 2–4).[177]

Some of the figured scenes in the synagogue mosaics, such as the binding of Isaac at Beth Alpha and Sepphoris, may refer to the Temple cult and sacrifices (see figs. 3, 4).[178] Not surprisingly, the most detailed and explicit Temple iconography found to date in a Palestinian synagogue comes from Sepphoris, which was the center of a priestly community.[179] In addition to Helios and the zodiac cycle and a representation of the Torah shrine flanked by menorahs and ritual objects, the images in this floor include Aaron before the Tabernacle, the binding of Isaac, and panels depicting cultic objects from the Temple (including a basket of first fruits, the table for the showbread, a lamb, a jar of oil, and a container of flour; see figs. 4, 5).[180]

Elior views the institution of the late antique synagogue as a manifestation of Temple and priestly traditions, describing it as a place in which "Temple ritual traditions were preserved along with traditions relating to the sacred language of hymns, songs of praise, blessings and holy names, sometimes associated with angels and priests. In the synagogue it was possible to pray for the reestablishment of the Temple and the sacred service."[181]

Helios and Jewish Mysticism

Hekhalot Literature

The figure of Helios or the sun is prominent in hekhalot literature, which consists of texts or works that were probably composed and redacted over the course of several centuries and perhaps in different locales.[182] The word *hekhal* is taken from the architecture of the Temple, where it refers to the hall or nave in front of the Holy of Holies. In hekhalot literature, the mystic ascends through heavenly palaces or temples to arrive at the divine chariot-throne (or throne of glory). The term *merkavah* refers to the divine chariot as a more specific name for the throne of God.[183] The mystical discipline of ascending through heavenly palaces or temples draws on visions like those described in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 and 10.[184] Ezekiel (1:4–22) transformed the ruined Temple into a vision of a heavenly chariot-throne with cherubim, wheels, and sacred creatures facing the four corners of the earth.[185] A work called *The Life of Adam and Eve* explicitly describes the merkavah as a "chariot" (*currus*) instead of a throne.[186] Chariot-thrones, that is, thrones mounted on wheeled chariots carried or flanked by fantastic creatures, were typical of ancient Near Eastern royalty.[187] The influence of earlier apocryphal literature, the Qumran writings, and the books of Enoch is evident in hekhalot literature.[188]

The Helios figure in synagogue mosaics is depicted in a wheeled chariot. The closest non-Jewish parallel for this motif is found in a fifth-century mosaic floor in a bathhouse on the island of Astypalaea in the Greek Dodecanese.[189] Helios with his crown of rays occupies the center of the mosaic. His right hand is raised, and in his left hand he holds a globe. Here, however, Helios is not depicted in a wheeled chariot, nor is he surrounded by the moon and stars. He is encircled

176 Contrary to Avi-Yonah, only in the case of Hammath Tiberias are the signs of the zodiac aligned with the correct seasons; see Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:47 (n. 16 above).

177 See Fine, *This Holy Place*, 112–21 (n. 60 above); Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art*, 236–85 (n. 12 above); Branham, "Sacred Space under Erasure," 387–89 (n. 62 above). The following passage from Elior, *Three Temples*, 2, highlights the Temple-oriented nature of the images in the synagogue mosaics: "The twenty-four priestly courses, each of which served one week, twice a year, were responsible for the order of Sabbaths and festivals, which were marked in ritual regularity by sacrifices, burnt-offerings and meal offerings, burning of incense, kindling of the seven-branched lampstand and blowing of trumpets, as well as songs of praise, benedictions and enunciations of the ineffable names of God." Levine, "Contextualizing Jewish Art," 123 (n. 17 above), notes that the Temple-oriented (and not rabbinic) nature of these images is confirmed by their depiction in synagogues of the Samaritans, who also had a sacerdotal class. Kühnel, "The Synagogue Floor Mosaic in Sepphoris," in *From Dura to Sepphoris*, 34 (n. 5 above), believes that the intent was to depict "the future Temple that is to be restored as the natural successor and cultic synthesis of the Tabernacle in the desert and the Temple in Jerusalem." The wheels depicted on the Capernaum relief indicate, in my opinion, that these rectangular structures with pitched roofs and double-paneled doors were intended to represent the Ark of the Tabernacle rather than a portable Torah shrine on wheels (although the Torah shrines in ancient synagogues were probably modeled after the Ark of the Tabernacle). Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art*, 219–20, fig. 57, describes the object in the Capernaum relief as a "wheeled Ark." H. Kohl and C. Watzinger, *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea* (Osnabrück, 1975), 193–95, suggested that it was a Roman *carruca*, or carriage, for transporting the members of the house of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi. For another interpretation, see E. L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece* (London, 1934), 17–18 n. 2. The Ark of the Tabernacle is depicted on wheels in one of the panels in the Dura Europos synagogue; see Kraeling, *Excavations at Dura-Europos*, pl. LVI (n. 77 above).

178 For a discussion of this theme, see Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 108–10 (n. 124 above); E. Kessler, "The 'Aqedah in Early Synagogue Art," in *From Dura to Sepphoris*, 73–81. In the Sepphoris mosaic, Abraham and Isaac were apparently depicted barefoot, as indicated by the two pairs of upturned shoes beneath the tree in that panel; see Weiss and Netzer, *Promise and Redemption*, 30–31 (n. 5 above). According to Weiss and Netzer, since this detail is not mentioned in the biblical account, it must reflect a lost midrash; also see Weiss, "Talmudic Literature," 27–28 (n. 14 above). However, Yahalom suggests that this detail reflects the influence of priestly groups at Sepphoris, who wished to keep alive the memory of the service in the Jerusalem Temple (which was performed barefoot; see Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 110; idem, "Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," 84–85 (n. 124 above): "the practice [of removing shoes during prayer] was [possibly] connected to members of the priestly line, for whom the gestural allusion to the Temple service was particularly important"). Also see Levine, "Contextualizing Jewish Art," 123 (n. 17 above). In an e-mail communication, 29 April 2003, Elior suggested to me that the practice of going barefoot in a holy place derives from God's command to Moses to remove his shoes before the burning bush. The depiction of the hand of God in the Beth Alpha mosaic and elsewhere seems to find literary expression in a Sar ha-Panim text: "Rabbi Ishmael said: It came out in the likeness of a hand and gave me at [once] [a se]al and a ring in his right hand" (from Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 132 [n. 7 above]).

179 Yahalom, "Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic," 89–90; Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 108–10; Miller, *Studies* (n. 145 above). Levine, "Contextualizing Jewish Art," 121 (n. 17 above), has also noted that "priestly-related interests seem to be unusually prominent in this mosaic." For a priest mentioned as a donor in the Sepphoris synagogue, see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 494 (n. 103 above).

180 See Fine, "Liturgical Context," 232–33 (n. 61 above); Weiss and Netzer, *Promise and Redemption* (n. 5 above); Weiss, "Talmudic Literature" (n. 14 above). For the aniconic Helios, see H. Mack, "The Unique Character of the Zippori Synagogue Mosaic and Eretz Israel Midrashim," *Cathedra* 88 (1998): 39–56 (in Hebrew).

181 *Three Temples*, 13 (n. 10 above). She notes that like the Temple service, the synagogue service is based on a weekly calendar of Sabbaths. Centuries after the destruction of the Temple, priests are still accorded special ritual treatment, including being called first to read the Torah and reciting the priestly benediction that was recited in the Temple.

182 See Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 9 (n. 7 above). According to Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, viii (n. 10 above), hekhalot literature was composed mainly in Palestine between ca. 200–700 CE. Also see R. Elior, "From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines," *JQR* 4 (1997): 217–18. E. R. Wolfson, "Heikhalot Literature," in *EDSS*, 349, believes that "it is likely that this mystical praxis was cultivated in Babylonia sometime in the amoraic period (fourth through fifth centuries)." For the connection between the oldest Hebrew merkavah texts preserved at Qumran and later hekhalot literature, see J. M. Baumgarten, "The Qumran Sabbath Shirot and Rabbinic Merkabah Traditions," *RQ* 13 (1988): 199–213.

183 P. Schäfer, "Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. J. Schäfer and H. G. Kippenberg (Leiden, 1997), 39; Elior, *Three Temples*, 252.

184 Elior, "Earthly Temple," 220–21, 227; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, viii. The mystical tradition of the Jews during the Talmudic period is called *Ma'aseh Merkavah*; ibid., 74. The basic studies are by Gershom Scholem; see *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, rev. ed. (New York, 1941), 40–79, and idem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1965).

185 Elior, *Three Temples*, 15, 31. Ezekiel was the son of a priest, and in his vision of the future earthly Temple, the service was entrusted exclusively to the priests of the house of Zadok. According to Elior (ibid., 34), "In these traditions, the very word *merkavah* became a symbolic concept expressive of the Holy of Holies and the Temple." The merkavah was explicitly associated with divine revelation (ibid., 66).

186 Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 99 (n. 117 above). For a midrash describing the appearance of God in a chariot at Sinai, see ibid., 174.

187 L'Orange, *Studies*, 49 (n. 84 above).

188 Elior, "Earthly Temple," 224–25. The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* from Qumran provides an early example of merkavah mysticism; see Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 13–14 (with references in n. 42; n. 76 above). Collins notes parallels between this work and the book of Revelation. At the same time, there are significant differences between the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and hekhalot literature, including the absence of the *Qedushah* (an angelic hymn) from the former, as well as different emphases; see C. A. Newsom, "Mysticism," in *EDSS*, 594.

189 See R. Jacoby, "The Four Seasons in Zodiac Mosaics: The Tallaras Baths in Astypalaea, Greece," *IEJ* 51 (2001): 224–30.

by the twelve signs of the zodiac with personifications of the four seasons in the corners.[190] As Ruth Jacoby has noted, the discovery of this mosaic in a remote locale indicates that this was probably not an uncommon motif in late antique art.[191] The Jewish communities of Palestine must have adopted and adapted this motif for use in synagogue mosaics. However, in the synagogue mosaics the Helios figure is always depicted in a wheeled chariot, that is, in a merkavah. It is also significant that the zodiac signs and season figures in synagogue mosaics are always labeled with their names in Hebrew, as we shall see.

Many hekhalot works describe a "descent" or heavenly journey in which "righteous" men, usually identified as rabbis, ascend to the heavens, talk with angels, observe and sometimes participate in the angelic liturgies, see God enthroned amid the heavenly hosts, are transformed themselves into angels, and receive revelations about the past and future. Such experiences are typically described as a "descent to the chariot" (a reference to the chariot vision of Ezekiel), and the adept is usually called the *yored merkavah* (the one who descends to the merkavah).[192] Some hekhalot works contain narratives in which the adept adjures an angel, compelling the divine being to descend from the heavens and appear and do his bidding. This category includes the *Sar ha-Torah* (Prince of the Torah) and *Sar ha-Panim* (Prince of the Presence or Countenance) traditions, in which the adept adjures this prince to obtain command of the Torah.[193] Drawing down the divine was accomplished in a variety of ways, such as by performing certain acts, by including uttering powerful commands or the divine name, or by means of prayer.[194] The purpose of these adjuration traditions is always the complete knowledge of Torah and protection from forgetting that knowledge, procured through the assistance of Sar ha-Torah.[195] According to Michael Swartz, the Sar ha-Torah texts were incorporated into the hekhalot corpus of ascent traditions by later redactors. He believes that the Sar ha-Torah traditions originated in the Amoraic period (ca. 200–500) and took further shape in the early Geonic period (early Middle Ages).[196]

Helios and Metatron

Few scholars have questioned the identification of the figure in the synagogue mosaics as the sun god Helios. Indeed Helios is the super-angel who is invoked or adjured in the magical work *Sepher ha-Razim* (Book of Mysteries).[197] Some scholars have therefore suggested that Helios is depicted in these mosaics as a heavenly intercessor to God on behalf of the congregation.[198] Similarly the savior god Mithras was typically portrayed as or identified with Helios.[199] According to Ross Kraemer, an account of the descent of an angel in the story of Joseph and Aseneth recalls the adjuration of Helios in *Sepher ha-Razim*.[200] She has noted other points of similarity between these two works, including

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid., 230.

192 See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 47; R. S. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (New York, 1998), 111.

193 The Sar ha-Torah and Sar ha-Panim texts contain detailed prescriptions for adjuration rituals embedded within a narrative; see Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 210 (n. 7 above). On p. 142 he discusses a Sar ha-Panim text that explicitly describes the mechanics of adjuring an angel to come to the adept on earth.

194 Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 95.

195 Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 12 (n. 184 above); Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 3–4, 25, 48, 135, 211. In these narratives a rabbi, usually Rabbi Ishmael, is instructed in the Sar ha-Torah procedure. Also see Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 63, 65, 66, 68 (n. 15 above). A passage in *Merkavah Rabbah* indicates that the Sar ha-Torah experience (the adjuration of Sar ha-Torah) was considered a substitute for ascension to the merkavah; see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 179 (n. 10 above).

196 *Scholastic Magic*, 54, 211–13. Swartz identifies both Palestinian and Babylonian elements in these texts. In contrast Halperin argued that the Sar ha-Torah materials are integral to the ascent texts in hekhalot literature (for a discussion see ibid., 210–11). Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 99, categorizes works with descriptions of heavenly ascensions and works with descriptions of the appearance on earth of angels who reveal secrets as different genres of hekhalot literature.

197 See M. A. Morgan, trans., *Sepher ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries* (Chico, Calif., 1983); P. S. Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC–AD 135)*, by E. Schürer, ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Goodman (Edinburgh, 1986), 349.

198 See, for example, Roussin, "Zodiac in Synagogue Decoration" (n. 12 above).

199 See A. F. Segal, *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity* (Atlanta, 1987), 86. For a discussion of the parallels between ascent accounts in hekhalot literature and the "Mithras liturgy," see Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 336–43.

200 *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 100–101 (n. 192 above).

Joseph's physical resemblance to Helios.[201] Kraemer even characterizes Helios as Joseph's "angelic double."[202]

The Helios at Hammath Tiberias is depicted as Sol Invictus, a guise that was used in Late Roman art to represent the emperor (see fig. 3). Jesus Christ was also depicted in this manner in early Christian art, as attested by a Christian tomb in the Vatican cemetery. The tomb's vault is decorated with a colored mosaic that dates roughly to the mid-third century. The center of the vault is occupied by a depiction of Christ as Sol Invictus or Helios, shown as a beardless young man riding in a chariot pulled by horses. A nimbus with seven radiating rays encircles his head.[203] At Hammath Tiberias, Helios wears a golden crown consisting of a double ring with vertical points (fig. 2). He too has a nimbus with seven radiating, multicolored rays framing his head.[204] Helios's outstretched right hand was intended to convey the magical or apotropaic power of salvation. This gesture was especially characteristic of Sol Invictus and, by way of extension, the later Roman emperors and also Christ.[205] In the later synagogues at Beth Alpha and Na'aran, the Helios figure is in a chariot but lacks the gold crown and does not hold a globe or have his hand raised (see fig. 3).[206]

The figure of Helios in the synagogue mosaics is contained within a circular shield called a *clipeus*. In the ancient Near East and in the Greco-Roman world, the clipeus was considered an image of the revolving cosmos.[207] The figure of the kosmokrator, that is, the god and/or king, was typically represented in the center of the clipeus, often with attributes of the sun.[208] The Romans adopted this iconography for the dead, placing the image of the deceased in the center of the clipeus. The idea of apotheosis was conveyed by surrounding the clipeus with a zodiacal wheel, which indicated that the deceased was now in heaven.[209] In Christian art, Jesus was portrayed as the kosmokrator in the center of the clipeus, seated on an astral throne and flanked by the heavenly luminaries.[210]

Since figures other than Helios were frequently depicted in late antique art, either with the attributes of Helios, in the guise of Sol Invictus, or in a clipeus surrounded by the signs of the zodiac, why assume that the figure in the synagogue mosaics can only be Helios?[211] Instead I suggest that the Helios figure was also intended to represent Metatron, the divine super-angel. As we have seen, the Sar ha-Torah and Sar ha-Panim texts consist of narratives in which the adept adjures an angel, compelling the divine being to descend from the heavens and do his bidding.[212] Sar ha-Torah (or Sar ha-Panim) is

201 Ibid., 163–67; and on p. 4: "Joseph enters the courtyard of Pentephres riding a gold chariot drawn by four snow-white horses with gold bridles. Over his white tunic, he wears a robe of purple linen embroidered in gold. On his head is a gold crown with twelve precious stones, and he holds a royal scepter in one hand. Watching Joseph's arrival from her tower window, Aseneth herself describes him as Helios (the Sun) come out of heaven in his very chariot."

202 Ibid., 155. For a different interpretation, see G. Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (Atlanta, 1996), who argues that this work was composed in the mid-2nd century BCE in Egypt by someone who was "intimately connected" with the Zadokite Oniad temple at Leontopolis, in response to controversies over the legitimacy of this temple (ibid., 83–94).

203 See J. Toynbee and J. Ward-Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter and the Vatican Excavations* (London, 1965), 72–74, 117, and pl. 32.

204 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias* 1:40 (n. 16 above).

205 See L'Orange, *Studies*, 139–40, 147–48, 165 (n. 84 above). As Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:41, noted, after the legalization of Christianity, the radiating gilt crown was never worn by the Christian emperors but instead became an attribute of Christ.

206 Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias*, 1:40.

207 L'Orange, *Studies*, 90.

208 Ibid., 93, 97.

209 Ibid., 98. An article examining the images of Helios and the zodiac cycle in relation to apotheosis was published when this study was in press: M. Friedman, "The Meaning of the Zodiac in Synagogues in the Land of Israel during the Byzantine Period," *Ars Judaica* 1 (2005): 51–62.

210 L'Orange, *Studies*, 114.

211 In fact Goodman has noted that by late antiquity the sun had become the symbol of monotheism not only among pagans but also among Christians and probably Jews. He has therefore proposed that the figure of Helios in the synagogue mosaics represents the God of Israel; see "Jewish Image of God," (n. 82 above). However, Gruenwald has pointed out that hekhalot literature stresses the idea that the mystics and angels do not have a direct visual encounter with God; see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 94 (n. 10 above). In fact, neither Christians nor Jews seem to have represented the image of God. Instead Christians depicted Christ (or a cross symbolizing Christ) as the intercessor or mediator to God in a central position in church mosaics, just as Helios (who I believe should be identified with Metatron, not God) occupies the center of synagogue mosaics (see the discussion below).

212 See Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* (n. 7 above); Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 371 (n. 117 above).

usually identified with Metatron.[213] I believe that the figure in the center of the synagogue mosaics was intended to represent both Helios and Metatron / Sar ha-Torah. Many images in late antique art were intended to be multivalent, just as literary texts could be interpreted or understood in different ways or at different levels—as revealed or hidden—depending on the knowledge and sophistication of the viewer or reader.[214] As Henry Maguire noted, "the Byzantines themselves welcomed ambiguity of expression; indeed they cultivated it."[215] Amoraic and early Geonic sources attest to the belief that there are two levels to the Torah: an exoteric one—the manifest or written Torah—and an esoteric one, consisting of divine names interpreted from the text of the written Torah.[216]

The 1965 excavations at Ein Gedi revealed a series of synagogue buildings one above the other. A lengthy inscription was discovered in the mosaic floor of the Stratum II synagogue, which was laid in the second half of the fifth century (fig. 6).[217] Thirteen ancestors of the world (from the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1:1–4) are listed at the beginning of this inscription: "Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalal, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth." These are followed by the names of the signs of the zodiac: "Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, and Aquarius, Pisces," and then by the Hebrew months and the names of the biblical patriarchs: "Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, Elul, Tishrei, Marheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, and Adar. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Peace."[218] Elior has observed that the ancestors named in this inscription (especially Enoch) were responsible for the transmission of the secrets of creation and the universe to future generations, including the solar calendar.[219] There is thus a connection between the names of the thirteen ancestors and the signs of the zodiac in this inscription.

Enoch is one of the central figures in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature.[220] Because he was the seventh forefather and lived for 365 years, Enoch became associated with the reckoning and transmission of the solar calendar.[221] For example, an Enochic work called *The Astronomical Book* (1 Enoch 72–82) is concerned almost exclusively with the calculations of the paths of the sun and moon in the service of a 364-day solar year.[222] Because Enoch's death is not described in the Biblical account (Genesis 5:24 simply states, "then he was no more, because God took him"), traditions developed in Jewish pseudepigraphical literature of the Second Temple period about his access to heavenly mysteries.[223] In hekhalot literature, Enoch was transformed from a human priest on earth into Metatron, an angelic priest who served in the supernal shrines and instructed the "descenders to the Merkavah" in the secrets of the heavenly Temple and the angelic service.[224] Enoch's ascent to the heavens and transformation into Metatron are described in a number of works, including 3 Enoch (*Sefer Hekhalot*).[225] According to this work, after God transformed the human Enoch into the angelic Metatron, he placed Metatron on a divine throne and appointed him ruler "of the denizens of the heights."[226] Metatron's body is described as consisting of parts blazing with fire.[227] His robes were decorated with heavenly lights, and he was given a royal crown with forty-nine stones, each like the sun. Setting it upon Metatron's head, God called him "the lesser YHWH."[228] Metatron is therefore more than an angel; he is a second deity who is "the lesser YHWH." He sits on a throne identical to the throne of God, and like God he rules heaven.[229] The name Metatron might derive from the Greek *metathronos*, meaning "one who stands after or behind the throne."[230] Metatron is frequently described as Sar ha-Torah or as a youth (*na'ar*).[231] David Halperin has noted that just as Metatron is a "lesser YHWH,"

213 See Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 72; Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 418, 420–26, 429–40; P. Schäfer, "Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages," *JJS* 41 (1990): 79; Elior, *Three Temples*, 250 (n. 10 above).

214 See, for example, Finney, *Invisible God*, 186 (n. 56 above), who describes the "multi-layered, associative symbolism" of early Christian art and literature. Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, 8–10 (n. 80 above), discusses the "polyvalence of images" in Early Byzantine art; "a single image...can be given several different but specific meanings according to the contexts in which it appears." Hansen, *Eloquence of Appropriation*, 212 (n. 89 above), describes early Christian texts as "rich in hidden patterns and obscure, intricate systems, matching the interest in numerical meanings in architecture."

215 *Earth and Ocean*, 10. For a discussion of the use of metaphor in early Christian architecture, see Hansen, *Eloquence of Appropriation*, 197–202, who notes that "the early Christian taste for multi-layered meanings" (ibid., 199) is "also observable in the architecture of the day" (ibid., 219).

216 See Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 228. Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 15 (n. 76 above), notes that apocalyptic literature has "multivalent symbolic meaning." Elior, *Three Temples*, 14–15, describes hekhalot literature as "creating a bridge between the 'revealed' and the hidden.'"

217 See D. Barag, "'En Gedi: The Synagogue," in *New Encyclopedia*, 407 (n. 11 above).

218 See L. I. Levine, "The Inscription in the 'En Gedi Synagogue," in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 140 (n. 13 above). G. Fassbeck, "Vom Mosaik zur Magie: Die Synagogeninschrift von Ein Gedi im Kontext des spätantiken Judentums," in *Religionsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments, Festschrift für Klaus Berger zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. A. von Dobbeler, K. Erlemann, and R. Heiligenthal (Tübingen, 2000), 103, has noted that the listing of the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob parallels the pictorial depiction of the offering of Isaac in the mosaic floors at Beth Alpha and Sepphoris. I am grateful to Gabriele Fassbeck for providing me with an offprint of her article.

219 "Jewish Calendar," 37 n. 18 (in Hebrew; n. 158 above). Also see eadem, *Three Temples*, 48–49 (n. 10 above): "The sevenfold solar year, measuring time on the basis of a sacred principle amalgamating the cosmic-astronomical order and the ritual-liturgical order, was first learned from its guardians, the angels in heaven, who taught it to men in the time of Enoch, the seventh patriarch of the world, who in turn taught it to his descendants the priests, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah, as we read in the books of Enoch." These are precisely the figures mentioned in the Ein Gedi inscription. The Zadokite priests legitimized their position by portraying the patriarchs—including Enoch, Noah (Enoch's grandson), Melchizedek, and Levi—as priests (see ibid., 173–74). The figure of Melchizedek was also popular in early Christian art and literature because he was viewed as the high priestly prototype for Jesus; see Segal, *Two Powers*, 72 (n. 106 above).

220 See G. E. Nickelsburg, "Enoch, Books of," in *EDSS*, 249–53.

221 See J. C. Reeves, "Enoch," in *EDSS*, 249; Elior, "Jewish Calendar," 36; Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology*, 93–94 (n. 151 above). Elior, *Three Temples*, 92, notes that the length of Enoch's life—365 years—parallels the number of days in the solar year, which is sometimes specified as 364 and sometimes as 365.

222 Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, 10 (n. 97 above); J. C. VanderKam, *Enoch, A Man for All Generations* (Columbia, S.C., 1995), 17, 19.

223 Reeves, "Enoch," 249. The mystical expressions in hekhalot literature were apparently an outgrowth of earlier Jewish apocalypticism; see E. R. Wolfson, "Heikhalot Literature," in *EDSS*, 349–50. Chariot speculation and a cosmology that divides the heavens into seven successive firmaments are common elements of these traditions. Because *Sepher ha-Razim* includes prayers offered to Helios, some scholars have connected the synagogue mosaics with a stream of mystical Judaism; see for example Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, abr. ed., 158 (n. 2 above); Roussin, "Zodiac in Synagogue Decoration," 93 (n. 12 above). For *Sepher ha-Razim* see n. 197 above.

224 M. Idel, "Enoch Is Metatron," in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism, Early Jewish Mysticism*, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 6.1–2, ed. J. Dan (Jerusalem, 1987), 151–70 (in Hebrew). Also see Elior, "Earthly Temple," 228–30 (n. 182 above), and *Three Temples*, 98–99.

225 See Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 8, 19–22 (n. 167 above); VanderKam, *Enoch*, 167–68. 3 Enoch was probably redacted in the 5th and 6th centuries; see Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 113 (n. 192 above). Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 192, believes it was written or compiled in the 6th century.

226 See Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 27–28 (3 Enoch 10.1): "R. Ishmael said: Metatron, the Prince of the Presence, said to me: All these things the Holy One, blessed be He, made for me: He made me a Throne, similar to the Throne of Glory."

227 Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 113.

228 See Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 32–33 (3 Enoch 12.1–5).

229 Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 426 (n. 117 above); C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition," *JJS* 43 (1992): 8; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 197–98; Elior, *Three Temples*, 239. Metatron was the only angel in heaven who enjoyed the privilege of sitting; see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 60 n. 113, 197 n. 12.

230 A. F. Segal, "Paul and the Beginning of Jewish Mysticism," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. J. J. Collins and M. Fishbane (Albany, 1995), 101. For this and other suggestions, see Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 125–42. According to Saul Lieberman, the title derives from *synthronos*, "one who shares the throne"; see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 235–41. Lieberman suggested that the Jews refrained from using the term *synthronos* because Christians used it as a title for Jesus. Also see G. G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *HTR* 76 (1983): 287.

231 See, for example, Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 6–7 (3 Enoch 3.1). See also n. 353, below.

he is also a "greater" Moses.[232] Indeed several hekhalot texts mention that when Moses ascended "to God" he received magical techniques for learning Torah.[233]

Magical Practices

Elior has suggested that the tradition of the merkavah, the festival of Shavuot (the feast of weeks, which was the Zadokite festival of the renewal of the covenant), the theophany on Mount Sinai, and Ezekiel's vision are interconnected. One reason is that the Pentateuchal reading for Shavuot is the passage describing the theophany on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19), and the prophetic reading (*haftarah*) is Ezekiel's vision of the merkavah (Ezekiel 1 and 10). According to Elior, "This coupling of the two readings is surely an indication of the ancient origins of the relationship between the two traditions that link sacred time with the sacred place where heavenly and earthly were bound together in oath and Covenant."[234] The mishnaic injunction against reciting the first chapter of Ezekiel as the prophetic reading on Shavuot (Mishnah Megillah 4:10) reflects rabbinic opposition or at least an attempt to restrict public discussion of the merkavah tradition.[235] The same attitude is apparent in another mishnaic passage: "It is forbidden for three persons to discuss the secrets of sexual union (Hebrew *'arayot*), for two persons to discuss *Ma'aseh bereshit*, and for a single person to discuss *Ma'aseh merkavah*, unless [that person] is wise and insightful" (Mishnah Hagigah 2:1).[236]

The position of the rabbis with regard to magic and mysticism is ambivalent and largely negative.[237] They seem to have fought a constant but unsuccessful battle against magical practices by trying to limit these practices only to authorized persons (usually themselves).[238] In some cases, the rabbis ruled that only they could determine which magical practices were permitted, thereby bringing these practices under their control.[239] Sometimes the rabbis tried to marginalize unauthorized practitioners by condemning them as *minim*.[240] Although the rabbis adopted some magical practices, they ultimately failed in their attempts to regulate their use.[241] A passage from Tosefta Hullin (2:22 ff.) illustrates this phenomenon:

An occurrence which happened to R. Eleazar b. Dama who was bitten by a snake. And Jacob of Kefar Sama came to heal him in the name of Jesus son of Pantera.[242] *But R. Ishmael did not allow him (to accept the healing). They said to him: You are not permitted, Ben Dama (to accept the healing from Jacob of Kefar Sama). He (R. Eleazar b. Dama) said to him (R. Ishmael): I shall bring you proof that he may heal me. But he did not have time to bring the (promised) proof before he dropped dead. Said R. Ishmael: Happy are you, Ben Dama. For you have expired in peace, but you did not break down the hedge erected by the sages. For whoever breaks down the hedge erected by the sages eventually suffers punishment, as it is said: He who breaks down a hedge is bitten by a snake. (Qoheleth 10:8)*[243]

This passage from Tosefta Hullin also reflects the kind of struggle over the invocation and use of the divine name that is one theme of the story of Joseph the Count. Rabbinic literature attests to the rabbis' efforts to control the use of the divine name: "And these are the ones who have no portion in the world to come: He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which does not derive from the Torah, and the Torah does not come from Heaven.... R. Aqiba says, 'Also: He who reads in heretical books, and he who whispers over a wound and says, I will put none of the diseases upon you which I have put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you (Ex. 15:26).' Abba Saul says,

232 *Faces of the Chariot*, 421. Also see Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 106–8; Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," 13. In fact, *Hekhalot Zutarti* mentions that "Metatron revealed himself to Moses" (from Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 144).

233 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 116 (n. 7 above). Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 208, mentions a Sar ha-Torah text according to which Metatron revealed the secrets of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai after Moses forgot what he had learned from God.

234 *Three Temples*, 154.

235 Ibid., 163–64. Also see D. J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, 1980), 39–59.

236 Elior, *Three Temples*, 162, 164, 220. For a discussion of this passage see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 75, who concludes that Tannaitic merkavah speculations were mainly midrashic in nature. Also see Halperin, *Merkabah*, 11–39.

237 For a story from the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Metsi'a' 59a) in which a rabbi is excommunicated for relying on magic and miracles to support a halakhic argument, see Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 32–33 (n. 6 above).

238 Schäfer, "Magic and Religion," 34–35 (n. 183 above); Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 37. As Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 106, 108 (n. 3 above), notes: "The rabbinic corpus evinces conflicts between rabbis, both about practices they could not control and with all sorts of competing figures who claimed access to supernatural forces.... The rabbis, to establish themselves as the religious elite, had to be daimon experts par excellence and as such displace others who claimed supernatural powers." For the influence of merkavah mysticism on rabbinic midrash (Tannaitic and later), see I. Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash* (Berlin, 1982). Chernus notes, for example, that the revelation of the Torah to the Israelites at Mount Sinai is described in rabbinic midrash in terms that are "strikingly similar" to those used in the literature of merkavah mysticism (ibid., 1): "It seems clear that nearly all of the important themes of Merkabah mysticism are also to be found in the tannaitic midrashim on the revelation at Sinai. The Israelites are said to be on the same plane as the angels, in an environment of fire, lightning, and thunder, in the presence of the divine chariot and 'glory' and the fiery word of God, which they see. They are given a weapon with the theurgically powerful ineffable Name, as well as the royal apparel of crowns and special garments. Their response to this is one of numinous awe and the singing of a hymn to God—the Song of Songs. And, very importantly, all of this takes place for one purpose: so that they may learn the divine teachings which have hitherto been unknown to human beings" (ibid., 11). Chernus concluded that most rabbis (at least from the 3rd century on) knew of the merkavah traditions and consciously excluded them from their eschatology (ibid., 100).

239 See the discussion of the "Ways of the Amorites" in N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (New York, 2001), 24.

240 See Taylor, *Christians and Holy Places*, 29 (n. 115 above). Goodman, "Sadducees and Essenes," 353 (n. 7 above), notes that the rabbis dismissed or ignored nonrabbinic Jews as *minim*, a term for anyone they considered a heretic. In contrast, Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 152 n. 21 (n. 6 above), understands this term as referring to Christians or Jewish-Christians. For a discussion of *birkath ha-minim* (a benediction of the *minim*), see Horbury, *Jews and Christians*, 67–110 (n. 56 above).

241 Schäfer, "Magic and Religion," 43 (n. 183 above). Janowitz observes that "magic" was used polemically in a pejorative sense by opponents; for example, early Christians described the Jewish use of phylacteries as magical, equating them with amulets; see *Icons of Power*, 1 n. 2 (n. 3 above). Also see Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 160–61 n. 65.

242 For the etymology of the term "Jesus son of Pantera," see Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 154–55 n. 27; Finney, *Invisible God*, 34 n. 31 (n. 56 above).

243 From Schäfer, "Magic and Religion," 35. For another discussion, see Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 34–35. This passage also reflects disagreement among the rabbis regarding the adoption of magical practices. Interestingly the Ein Gedi synagogue inscription (fig. 6) mentions a Rabbi Yose ben Hilfi, and one of the amulets from Horvat Kanaf was made for the benefit of a certain "Rabbi Eleazar son of Esther"; see J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1985), 38. There is also evidence for changing attitudes among the rabbis over time. David Halperin has noted a hardening hostility among the rabbis toward the merkavah traditions in the last decades before Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi and his associates edited the Mishnah; see *Faces of the Chariot*, 23, 25 (n. 117 above).

'Also: he who pronounces the divine Name as it is spelled out.'"[244] The name of God in its many forms was the highest goal of the mystic because it contains in it everything. Therefore, mastery of the name meant mastery not only of the Torah but over the universe and even God.[245] Because the invocation of the divine name was believed to impart God's creative powers, its use was restricted.[246] Instead, the term "Explicit Name" (Hebrew *shem meforash*) was used, signaling the mystery and secrecy surrounding God's real name.[247] In a passage from *Hekhalot Zutarti*, Rabbi Akiba cautions his students: "My sons, be careful about the Name; it is a great name, a holy name, and a pure name."[248]

The inscription in the floor of the Ein Gedi synagogue may provide physical evidence for the practice of invoking divine or magical names (fig. 6).[249] Scholars usually interpret the fact that the signs of the zodiac are inscribed on the floor as a reflection this community's opposition to the depiction of images.[250] However, it might instead have provided a more efficacious way of invoking these figures, or perhaps it served as a practical guide for the purposes of adjuration. Interestingly, this inscription is not located in the nave of the synagogue, where the images of Helios and the zodiac cycle in other synagogues were always placed, but in the western aisle (or narthex on the western side of the nave), probably where the congregation stood or sat. The importance of the proper invocation of names (and the invocation of the correct names) is evident in the consistent and universal use of Hebrew instead of Aramaic or Greek in the labeling of certain figures in the mosaic floors of synagogues, including the signs of the zodiac and the four seasons. This is the case in the Ein Gedi synagogue, where the names in the first part of the inscription are in Hebrew and the rest of the inscription is in Aramaic.[251] The same phenomenon is attested in literary works. For example, in *Sepher ha-Razim*, the Greek prayer invoking Helios is transliterated into Hebrew.[252] Even in the Christian *Apocalypse of Paul*, the ministering angels speak and sing in Hebrew![253] In mosaics depicting Helios and the zodiac cycle, all the figures (the seasons, signs of the zodiac, and human figures such as Abraham, Isaac, and Aaron) except for Helios-Metatron are labeled in Hebrew.[254] The figure of Helios-Metatron is the only one that

244 Mishnah Masekhat Sanhedrin 10:1; trans. J. Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, 1988), 604. For a discussion of this passage, see H.-J. Becker, "The Magic of the Name and Palestinian Rabbinic Literature," in *Talmud Yerushalmi*, 3:398–99 (n. 8 above).

245 Schäfer, "Magic and Religion," 42; also see R. Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology: The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature," *JSQ* 1 (1993): 11. On the other hand, Becker, "Magic of the Name," 392, notes that the rabbis attempted to restrict but did not attack merkavah speculation, and that "the most fundamental issue in both Hekhalot and magical texts is not Merkavah speculation, but the magical usage of the power that dwells in a name, particularly in the name or names of God."

246 Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 25 (n. 3 above). According to 3 Enoch 13.1–2, God wrote the letters with which he had created heaven and earth and all that they contain on Metatron's crown, which means this crown was inscribed with the magical or mystical formula of creation; see Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 203–4 (n. 10 above); Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 34–35 (n. 167 above). This kind of mysticism assumed that the world was created by letters, and that the letters could be combined by magic to reconstruct the formula or code of the creative process; Becker, "Magic of the Name," 402.

247 Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 28–29. As Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 109–10, 121 (n. 6 above), notes, the invocation of the Shema', affirming the unification of God's name, became for Jewish martyrs the functional equivalent of the declaration "I am a Christian" by Christian martyrs (and I believe it was intended to counter the Christian dogma of a holy trinity).

248 From Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 145. The divine name and other magical names were used theurgically to control and force the angels to do the will of the adept; see Alexander, "Incantations," 361 (n. 197 above); Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 12 (n. 245 above).

249 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 20 (n. 7 above), has identified three characteristic elements of Jewish magical texts: (1) the emphasis on the power of the name of God; (2) angels that serve as intermediaries between divine providence and human needs; and (3) the application of divine names and ritual practices for the needs of specific individuals.

250 See, for example, Schwartz, "Rabbinization," 58 (n. 8 above). For a discussion with references, see Fassbeck, "Vom Mosaik zur Magie," 100 (n. 218 above).

251 See Levine, "Inscription," 142 (n. 218 above).

252 Alexander, "Incantations," 349.

253 Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 70–71.

254 Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 255 (n. 51 above), made a similar observation: "Aramaic and Greek tend to prevail in synagogue inscriptions, but the zodiac circles invariably feature inscriptions in Hebrew, perhaps because it was understood to be the language of creation, of the cosmos, or of God." At Sepphoris, the seasons are labeled in Greek as well as in Hebrew.

is never labeled. Perhaps this reflects the power and secrecy associated with Metatron and his name.[255]

Rabbinic opposition to mystical and magical practices should be understood within the context of an internal Jewish struggle over the acquisition and control of Torah knowledge.[256] After all, the rabbis claimed sole authority over the interpretation of Torah and in matters of *halakhah*.[257] In contrast we have seen that the purpose of adjuration traditions is always command of Torah, procured through the assistance of Sar ha-Torah. In fact, the Sar ha-Torah texts claim to impart not specific information but the capacity to learn, following a tradition of angelic revelation of divine secrets.[258] These practices undermined the rabbis' claims that they were the sole authorities for Torah knowledge and interpretation. According to Halperin, "The *Hekhalot* are the work of people who had every reason to detest the rabbis, and indeed are directed in large measure against the rabbis' status."[259] Similarly Swartz has observed that the "authors [of the Sar ha-Torah texts] invoked the authority of the early rabbis to promote their magical recipes. Moreover these recipes offered nothing less than shortcuts to success in the endeavor most valued by the rabbinic estate—the study of Torah."[260] The fact that rabbinic texts begin to polemicize about ascent practices in the third century points to contemporary struggles over the rituals that controlled access to earthly and heavenly power.[261] The concern with gaining Torah knowledge is reflected in the importance of the revelation at Sinai in the merkavah tradition.[262] This concern may be expressed visually by the depiction of the Ark of the Tabernacle or Torah shrine in a prominent position in the mosaic floor of the synagogue, at the end of the nave (see figs. 2–4, 7). Perhaps the manner in which the doors of this structure are always represented as closed alludes to the mystery of the Torah that is hidden within.[263]

Heavenly Temples and Earthly Priests

The vision of a heavenly Temple is expressed in the literature of the priestly apocalyptic community at Qumran, which rejected the cult in the earthly Temple.[264] This type of speculation seems to have gained wider acceptance among the Jews in Palestine after the destruction of the Second Temple, filling the void left by that event. Hekhalot literature (including the Sar ha-Torah texts) attempts to legitimize its stories and practices by associating them with rabbis, usually Rabbi Akiba, Rabbi Ishmael, and Rabbi Nehuniah.[265] However, these texts did not originate in rabbinic circles, which marginalized or excluded this literature and the practices it espouses.[266] Furthermore the priests and Davidic kings do not appear as clearly defined groups in the rabbinic chain

255 K. E. Grozinger has noted that for merkavah mystics "the highest knowledge of man in this world is not the knowledge of God, but the knowledge of the celestial names, particularly those of Metatron and God"; "The Names of God and the Celestial Powers: Their Function and Meaning in the Hekhalot Literature," in *Proceedings*, 60 (n. 224 above). In fact, Metatron—whose name is like the Name of God and was therefore called the "lesser YHWH"—had seventy names, expressing his power (ibid., 62). For a similar concern with the secret name of God in Gnosticism, see Segal, *Two Powers*, 249–50 (n. 106 above). For the use of secret "passwords" in theurgic ritual, see S. I. Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgic Ascent in its Cultural Milieu," in *Envisioning Magic*, 185–89 (n. 183 above). Johnston (ibid., 190) notes that "in some of the Merkavah ascent texts, similarly, the names of the angelic gatekeepers are necessary for the ascender to proceed through each of the various checkpoints."

256 As Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 39 (n. 6 above), noted, disputes over prophetic and rabbinic modes of authority and authorization for halakhic practice may have created tensions among the rabbis (and, I believe, between the rabbis and other Jewish groups). For a similar view, see Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 437 (n. 117 above).

257 As Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 26 (n. 7 above), has noted, "In rabbinic theology, Torah constitutes both the substance of revelation and its content."

258 Ibid., 50.

259 *Faces of the Chariot*, 442.

260 *Scholastic Magic*, 216.

261 Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 74 (n. 3 above).

262 See, for example, Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 414.

263 Hekhalot literature also suggests that the Ark of the Tabernacle or Torah shrine was equated with the divine chariot-throne, although the terms *teivah* (Ark) and *merkavah* are not entirely synonymous; see Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 171–73 (n. 125 above).

264 Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, 28 (n. 97 above).

265 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 210, 214; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 147. Also see Elior, *Three Temples*, 240–43 (n. 10 above); she suggests that Rabbi Ishmael the High Priest doubled for Aaron the priest, whereas Rabbi Akiba, who "entered the *pardes*" was a counterpart of Moses, who ascended to heaven.

266 See, for example, Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 127: "No conclusive proof has yet been found that the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* were directly involved in the creation of the Hekhalot writings." Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 16 (n. 76 above), has noted that apocalyptic literature represents "a profound expression of crisis among those who are cut off from the sources of social and religious power."

of tradition, but have been replaced by the sages and their predecessors.[267] In contrast, although hekhalot literature uses the rabbinic chain of tradition as a model, the magical name, praxis, or text is substituted for the process of Torah study. The chain culminates, not in the succession of latter-day rabbis down to the present day, but in the conclusion that all these names and secrets are available to "all Israel."[268]

Which circles produced the hekhalot literature? According to Halperin, it was written by *'ammei ha-aretz*, the lower classes of Jewish society, as a protest against rabbinic authority.[269] Swartz disagrees, noting that the authors had some degree of education. He believes that scribes and other literate "synagogue functionaries" produced this literature.[270] However, I find Elior's association of hekhalot literature with the descendants or successors of the dispossessed Zadokite priests most persuasive. Elior argues that "although there were surely other centers of power, authority and knowledge at all times...no social group other than the priests commanded the sacred authority, the eternal, dynastic privilege, rooted in the sacred scriptures and in divine assurance."[271] She has attributed the emergence of hekhalot literature to the need to create a new spiritual world after the destruction of the Second Temple, especially among certain priestly circles.[272] According to Elior, "The authors of this literature were inspired directly by priestly tradition and belonged to circles whose concern was to preserve and consolidate a visionary and ritual tradition associated mythopoetically with the Temple service."[273] After the destruction of the Temple, the ritual traditions of the priests serving in the earthly Temple were transferred to angels ministering in seven celestial sanctuaries, in an attempt to perpetuate the Temple traditions beyond the boundaries of time and space.[274] In hekhalot literature, the angels are associated with the celestial Temple and are involved with ritual ceremonies and heavenly prayer before the throne of God. These heavenly tasks are described in relation to the priesthood and the Temple.[275] Early Jewish and Christian apocalypses envision heaven as a temple, depicting the visionary's achievement of equality with the angels through the language of priestly investiture.[276] In 2 (Slavonic) Enoch 9:17–19, for example, the process by which Enoch becomes an angel is described as a priestly investiture, with Enoch clothed in special garments and anointed with oil.[277] In 1 (Ethiopic) Enoch, the angels are the priests of the heavenly Temple,

267 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 176–77. Also see ibid., 102–3, for a text that assigns greater sanctity to the Second Temple than to the First Temple, which is not usually the case in rabbinic literature. Similarly, Elior, *Three Temples*, 205, notes that in the Mishnaic Tractate of Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), the rabbis omit the priestly dynasty as a link in the chain of transmission of the Torah. For more on this "rabbinic deprivileging" of priestly status by pedigree, see Fraade, "Priests, Kings, and Patriarchs," 319 n. 13 (n. 123 above). C. E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York, 2002), 188–89, observes that rabbinic laws are surprisingly lenient toward intermarriage. The rabbis valued Torah learning above lineage and purity of genealogical descent as a criterion for authority and leadership: "One senses in this tradition the rabbis' almost mischievous delight in subverting the genealogical claims of the priestly class" (ibid., 189). This attitude characterizes Palestinian rabbis, whereas the Babylonian sages emphasized genealogical superiority; see R. Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* (New York, 1999), 51. Nonetheless, the Babylonian Talmud seems more lenient than the Palestinian rabbinic tradition in allowing the magical use of the name of God; see Becker, "Magic of the Name," 397, 399, 400 (n. 244 above).

268 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 190.

269 This recalls the "peasant revolt" models and Marxist theories of interpretation that were popular in academic circles in the 1960s and 1970s. For a review of Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, see R. Elior, "Merkabah Mysticism: A Critical Review," *Numen* 37.2 (1990): 233–49, whose main criticism is that he ignores the literal meaning of hekhalot literature by denying all significance of mystical experience as an inspiration. Elior also finds untenable Halperin's suggestion that this literature emerged from the illiterate and uneducated masses.

270 *Scholastic Magic*, 219–20. For Schäfer's suggestion that this literature was the product of a "post-rabbinic elite," see ibid., 12–13 n. 36.

271 Elior, *Three Temples*, 5 (n. 10 above).

272 "Earthly Temple," 222–24 (n. 182 above).

273 Ibid., 226; also see Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 25 (n. 245 above), and *Three Temples*, 263.

274 Elior, *Three Temples*, 233. This type of speculation originated before the destruction of the Second Temple, when the Zadokites were replaced as officiating priests by the Hasmoneans; see, for example, Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 130: "For people who considered the temple as being defiled by the hands of an unworthy clan of priests, there was left no alternative but to conceive of God as having to withdraw His presence from the earthly temple to the uppermost heaven whereto the defiled hands of a sinful priesthood could not reach." For ascension stories in apocalyptic literature from Qumran that reflect animosity toward the Jerusalem (non-Zadokite) priesthood, see ibid., 132. According to Gruenwald (ibid., 138), "Apocalypticism gives, among other things, expression to that criticism of the Jerusalem-priesthood." After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Zadokite criticism of the Jerusalem priesthood became irrelevant, which is why hekhalot literature (unlike the earlier apocalyptic literature), lacks polemics against the priestly usurpers.

275 Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 17. Also see eadem, *Three Temples*, ix, 233.

276 Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, vii (n. 97 above).

277 Ibid., 4, 40.

and the High Priest is Enoch himself, who appears in the celestial Holy of Holies to procure forgiveness for holy beings who have defiled themselves by living among humans.[278]

Christopher Morray-Jones has observed that the hekhalot traditions presuppose the idea that certain persons were able to achieve a transformation into the likeness of divine glory that conferred upon them supernatural powers and mediatory functions. These people served as intercessors between the earthly community and the realm of God.[279] Who were these intercessors? I suggest that this function was filled largely by members of the priestly class or by adepts who assumed the role of priestly intercessors on behalf of the congregation. They were the earthly counterparts of the angelic figures that served in the supernal shrines.[280] According to some apocalyptic works, the adept must be consecrated as a priest before he is admitted to the heavenly Temple in which the divine presence dwells.[281] Metatron is called even the heavenly High Priest.[282] Morray-Jones has noted that "when taking part in the celestial liturgy, the adept acts as the representative of the people before God, as well as being commissioned to declare what has been revealed to him. In other words, he performs a function analogous to that of the High Priest in the Temple. A passage found in some versions of *Hekhalot Rabbati* indicates that the adept, here typified by Metatron-as-Enoch, has taken over the priestly function of atonement."[283] According to rabbinic tradition, the name of God was uttered by the High Priest when he entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.[284] Elior has observed that this parallels the pronunciation of the Explicit Name by Metatron at the peak of the celestial ceremony: "The figure of the High Priest and that of Metatron, the Prince of the Countenance, the holy names, the twelve stones of the High Priest's breastplate, the angels prostrating themselves, the Ineffable Name (Tetragrammaton) and its ceremonial enunciation, the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies—all these elements appear in the service of the Day of Atonement in the earthly Temple as portrayed in Rabbinic tradition (Tractate Yoma in the Mishnah) and in the rites performed in the heavenly sanctuary as portrayed in esoteric traditions."[285] In 3 Enoch, when the ministering angels protest that Rabbi Ishmael should not have access to the celestial merkavah because he is only a human being, Metatron, overriding their objections, responds that Rabbi Ishmael is a priest of the tribe of Levi.[286] This suggests that priestly descent was considered desirable for those coming into direct contact with the divine presence through ascent or adjuration.[287]

Elior's association of hekhalot literature with the priestly class may find support in the rituals prescribed in the Sar ha-Torah texts. These rituals, which include fasts, abstinence, and ablutions, were meant to ensure that the adept recited the divine name and other magical names in a state of absolute ritual purity.[288] Swartz has noted that these rituals not only go beyond the halakhic norm but are at odds with the rabbinic purity system.[289] For example, the prohibition against eating vegetables that appears in several of these texts may be rooted in the belief that "wet" foods can contract impurity more

278 See Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 82 (n. 117 above). The fact that the earthly Temple has now been replaced by a heavenly one explains why angelic song, liturgy, and prayer figure much more prominently than sacrifice in apocalyptic literature; see Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, 33, 36.

279 Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," 21 (n. 229 above).

280 See Elior, *Three Temples*, 170–71, 191.

281 Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, 37.

282 Ibid., 45; Segal, "Paul," 101; Elior, *Three Temples*, 185.

283 "Transformational Mysticism," 21.

284 Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 29 (n. 3 above). But Hayim Lapin pointed out to me that Mishnah Sukkah 4:5 describes the invocation of the divine name during a rite connected with the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot).

285 Elior, *Three Temples*, 244, and "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 46 (n. 245 above).

286 See Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 5–6 (3 Enoch 2.1–3; n. 167 above).

287 Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 194 (n. 10 above). However, priestly descent was not a prerequisite; see Elior, *Three Temples*, 250; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 299 (n. 192 above). Flesher, "Literary Legacy," 493 (n. 125 above), notes that ancient synagogue leaders included "the same people who seem to have been doing it before the destruction [of the Jerusalem Temple]: the local people of the community, a mix of 'average' Jews and members of the priestly class. Despite the small numbers of priests, percentage-wise at least, their prestige and status would have made them prominent and active participants."

288 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 157–58 (n. 7 above).

289 Ibid., 164, 214. In contrast, Elior, "Merkabah Mysticism," 244–45 (n. 269 above), argues that hekhalot literature affirms the rabbinic ethos and strictly adheres to *halakhah*, and that there is no explicit criticism of the rabbinic world or its law. For a discussion of the story of Rabbi Nehuniah's deposition from heaven in *Hekhalot Rabbati* and its relationship to rabbinic *halakhah*, see Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 170–71, and Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 163–65, 241–44 (an appendix by S. Lieberman).

easily than dry foods.[290] Many of the rituals display an extreme concern with menstrual purity. For this reason, practitioners were instructed to eat food they themselves had prepared ("bread of his own hands"), as opposed to the "bread of a woman."[291] Other rituals connected with purity and purification include ablutions and the wearing of white garments.[292] The prescriptions for these rituals reflect a sophisticated knowledge and understanding of *halakhah*.[293] They also suggest that the Sar ha-Torah texts were meant to be enacted and not just read.[294] Swartz has observed that whereas the Pharisaic and rabbinic purity systems deemphasized the cultic nature of the purity requirements, the Sar ha-Torah texts require a high level of purity only for those individuals who come into contact with the divine, in this case in the heavenly rather than the earthly Temple.[295]

Access to Torah Knowledge

I believe that synagogue buildings decorated with Helios and the zodiac cycle were the locus of an internal Jewish struggle over access to and command of Torah knowledge and revelation. As Halperin has observed, "Only in the synagogue could they [the people] gain the knowledge that would give shape to their longings, context and purpose to their magic formulae and rituals."[296] Levine has noted that parallels between some prayers of the synagogue liturgy and hekhalot texts indicate a relationship between them, and asks "whether such priestly Hekhalot circles might have had an impact on other aspects of the synagogue."[297] Perhaps tensions existed between the rabbis and priests in part because of the role that some priests played as intercessors on behalf of the community.[298] *Hekhalot Rabbati* lists special accomplishments attributed to the merkavah mystics which supposedly elevated their social position.[299] Elior has noted that "the conception of the priests as possessing a secret, mantic knowledge, and as guardians of the Torah, is parallel to the view of the angels as possessing secrets and arcana, as a source of hidden celestial knowledge and as the guardians of the Torah on high."[300]

Elior believes that by the time hekhalot literature was composed, the descendants of the dispossessed Zadokite priests had lost the battle for hegemony to the rabbis: "But while they conceded defeat, accepted Rabbinic authority and co-operated with the established leadership on an earthly level, they did not renounce their vision in the spiritual sense."[301] Similarly Gruenwald has

290 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 160. For a similar concern among the Qumran community, see J. Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, 2002), 86.

291 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 162–63; Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 134–44 (n. 15 above). However, I disagree with Lesses's conclusion (ibid., 144), "while the Qumran prescriptions were a tool with which the sect isolated itself from the rest of the world as the true Israel, the Hekhalot prescriptions, by contrast, set the adept aside from the community only for the specified period of time during which he engaged in the ritual; after that time he reentered the community and resumed appropriate social and sexual contact with women. The sectarian prescriptions of Qumran, which defined a community, became in the Hekhalot texts a pietistic practice defining a person as part of a community even as he engaged in practices that set him apart from it." The underlying concept in both cases is the same—the need to achieve a state of absolute purity for the purpose of coming into contact with the divine. The Qumran community did this because they constituted themselves as a substitute Temple, universalizing the purity laws required for priests serving in the Temple to all full members. However, at least some sectarians were married and had children, so that not everyone maintained this high level of purity all the time. Similarly, in the hekhalot texts, the adept needs to attain the highest level of purity for the purpose of coming into contact with the divine, but presumably at other times he lived a "normal" life.

292 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 165.

293 As noted by Lieberman in Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 244.

294 As suggested by Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 13, 118 (citing similar opinions by M. Smith and Gruenwald). Lesses (ibid., 215), notes that "the adjurations evidence a subtle yet pervasive attention to staging and performance." For the opposite view, see Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, 108–10 (n. 97 above). Also see Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 16 n. 48; Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 7 n. 24 (n. 76 above).

295 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 171–72. A. F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, 1990), 61, notes that "in apocalypticism and Jewish mysticism ascensions to God were the prerogative only of the most pure, made after the adept went through several ritual preparations, including fasting and cleansings but preeminently through ritual immersion." Because the Qumran community believed that angels lived among them (that is, they were in constant contact with the divine), members were required to maintain the highest level of ritual purity.

296 *Faces of the Chariot*, 443 (n. 117 above).

297 "Contextualizing Jewish Art," 128–29 (n. 17 above).

298 Much of the "rich priestly tradition" was suppressed by the rabbis, who sought to perpetuate the memory of the Temple while supplanting the priestly hegemony; see Elior, *Three Temples*, 5–6, 14 (n. 10 above). Elior (ibid., 13) notes that "when Rabbinic tradition discusses the Temple and its service, it is always concerned with the *past*."

299 Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 151 (n. 10 above).

300 "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 47 (n. 245 above).

301 *Three Temples*, 263.

noted that hekhalot literature does not contain any explicit form of criticism toward opponents and does not bear any sectarian trademarks.[302] It has been suggested that hekhalot texts attributing extraordinary qualities and social status to the mystics belong to a period when real mystical visions were no longer experienced.[303] In my opinion, the construction of synagogue buildings filled with Temple imagery including Helios and the zodiac cycle (as well as the Ein Gedi inscription) indicates that magical-mystical practices and the consequent struggle over access to and control of Torah knowledge continued through late antiquity.

Jewish magical texts provide evidence of ritual practices. According to Swartz, these texts are characterized by an emphasis on the name of God, by the presence of angelic intermediaries, and by the invocation of divine names and use of ritual practices for the needs of specific individuals. He describes the Sar ha-Torah texts as examples of scholastic magic, that is, magic in the service of scholasticism.[304] Amulets, physical evidence for another type of magical practice, were discovered in Palestinian synagogues, in contexts dating to the fifth to seventh centuries. They include one bronze amulet that was buried under the north façade of the synagogue at Meroth,[305] a bronze amulet that was buried under a stone near the threshold of a doorway in the "small synagogue" at Kfar Bar'am,[306] nineteen bronze amulets from the apse of the synagogue at Ma'on (Nirim),[307] and an ostracon inscribed with an Aramaic adjuration from Horvat Rimmon.[308] Supplicants placed the amulets in synagogues because these buildings were the locus of divine power and revelation.[309]

I therefore propose that the figure depicted in the center of synagogue floors decorated with the zodiac cycle represents not only Helios but also Metatron, who has been invoked by the adept and compelled to appear in order to impart Torah knowledge to the community. My proposed identification of Helios with Metatron may find support in the single occurrence of the name "Helenio," apparently a corrupted form of Helios, in the *Zohar*, a later Jewish mystical work.[310] Neta Sobol has noted that, like the Helios figure in ancient synagogue mosaics, Metatron is described in mystical literature as seated on a chariot-throne (merkavah) supported by four animals.[311] Sobol concludes that "Helenio the sun...is a *hapax legomenon* for Metatron."[312] In my opinion, the Helios-Metatron figure in the Sepphoris mosaic is *not* aniconic because of that community's opposition to anthropomorphism (as generally assumed), but instead was intended to convey the awesome appearance of Metatron, who was literally ablaze with fire. 3 Enoch 15.1 describes Enoch's transformation to Metatron as follows: "[A]t once my flesh turned to flame, my sinews to blazing fire, my bones to juniper coals, my eyelashes to lightening flashes, my eyeballs to fiery torches, the hairs of my head to hot flames, all my limbs to wings of burning fire, and the substance of my body to blazing fire."[313] The Ark of the Tabernacle or Torah shrine and other cultic images depicted in the synagogue mosaics not only allude to the earthly Temple but can be understood as a visual depiction of the heavenly Temple in which Metatron and the other angels reside (see figs. 2–4).[314] A work called *The Visions of Ezekiel* details in words the images

302 *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 133.

303 Ibid., 171.

304 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 20, 209.

305 See Z. Ilan, "Meroth," in *The New Encyclopedia*, 1029–30 (n. 11 above); J. Naveh and S. Shaked, eds., *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1993), 43–50.

306 See M. Aviam, "The Ancient Synagogues at Bar'am," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 3.4:163 (n. 32 above); Aviam, "The Ancient Synagogues of Baram," *Qadmoniot* 35.2 (2002): 120 (in Hebrew).

307 Three of which have been read; see Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 16, 90–101 (n. 243 above).

308 See A. Kloner, "Rimmon, Ḥorvat," in *New Encyclopedia*, 1285; Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 85–89. For amulets from a domestic context at Horvat Kanaf in the Golan, see Z. U. Ma'oz, "Kanaf, Ḥorvat," in *New Encyclopedia*, 849. For a discussion of these amulets, see Fassbeck, "Vom Mosaik zur Magie," 107–8 (n. 218 above). Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 103 (n. 3 above), notes that amulets represent the divine presence in a specific location.

309 Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 16, suggested that the amulets at Ma'on were buried in the apse because this was "as close as possible to the spot which served as a gate for communication (through prayer) with heaven." For connections between the inscriptions on the amulets and hekhalot literature, see Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 352–54 (n. 15 above). For a possible Aramaic version of the name Metatron on a Palestinian amulet, see Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 74–75.

310 I am grateful for Neta Sobol for bringing this reference to my attention and for providing me with a copy of her unpublished MA thesis (Department of Jewish Philosophy at Tel-Aviv University): "The Pikudin Section of the Zohar" (Ramat-Aviv, 2001), 80–84 (in Hebrew).

311 Ibid., 82.

312 Ibid., 83 (my translation from the Hebrew).

313 Translation from Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 113 (n. 192 above). Also see Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 39 (n. 167 above).

314 Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 258–59 (n. 51 above), notes that late antique synagogues "seem to embody a different notion of sanctity from that evident in rabbinic texts. The synagogue seems often to have constituted an unearthly realm, a reflection of the heavenly temple" (although many of Schwartz's views otherwise differ from mine).

represented in the mosaics. It describes a merkavah journey with "Jerusalem rebuilt and restored; the sanctuary, temple, [tablets of] testimony [Exodus 25:16], ark, candelabrum [menorah], table [Exodus 25:23–30], and vessels; all the adornments of the Temple."[315]

Other elements in the Sepphoris mosaic point to connections with the solar calendar and the priestly class. For example, the figure of Aaron is depicted prominently in the center of the third register, standing next to the Tabernacle and flanked by sacrificial animals and cultic objects (see fig. 5).[316] According to the book of Jubilees, after Moses received instruction about the solar calendar on Mount Sinai, he imparted this knowledge to his brother, Aaron the priest, who became the guardian of that information. This calendar was then entrusted to the Zadokite priests serving in the Temple.[317] Aaron is thus the priestly ancestor who transmitted to his successors the knowledge of the solar calendar.

The Invocation of Secret Names

A number of scholars have noted the theurgic aspects of the adjuration rituals, in which an adept used words and actions to invoke the gods.[318] The evidence reviewed here suggests that the adepts in synagogues were priests or assumed a priestly role as earthly intercessors who invoked the divine angel. They provided access to the angels, their heavenly counterparts in the supernal shrines, leading the prayers and liturgical recitations that compelled the divine super-angel to appear.[319] The worship of the angels in the celestial shrines provided a liturgical model that was imitated by those who adjured them. This worship included the recitation of praises and prayers, the singing of hymns, and the uttering of the divine name.[320] Incantation and prayer are closely related in the hekhalot texts.[321] Swartz has shown that the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* began as a corpus of prayers depicting God's creation of heaven and earth, the praise of God by the angels, and acknowledging the worshipper's participation in this heavenly praise. The recitation of these prayers was meant to express the worshipper's participation in an earthly liturgy that corresponded to the angelic liturgy.[322] Later, magical and theurgic formulas consisting of strings of divine names, numinous phrases, and biblical verses were incorporated into these prayers. The magical names invested the prayers with theurgic potency, enabling those who recited them to acquire esoteric secrets.[323] Janowitz has noted that an early liturgical ascent text from Qumran called the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (4Q400–407) describes the heavenly cult but contains no direct citations of angelic praise. In contrast hekhalot literature is characterized by repetitions of the exact words of the heavenly liturgy, making the reciter a participant in the heavenly chorus.[324] The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* prayers incorporate elements such

315 From Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 267 (n. 117 above). Also see Elior, *Three Temples*, 258 (n. 10 above), who notes that all of the cultic elements in Solomon's Temple underwent a metamorphosis and were transferred to the imagery of the heavenly hekhalot.

316 See Weiss and Netzer, *Promise and Redemption*, 20 (n. 5 above). Levine, "Contextualizing Jewish Art," 121 (n. 17 above), notes that the emphasis on the Tabernacle and Temple "is a further indication of a priestly emphasis." He discusses (ibid., 123–30) other elements in the mosaic that may reflect priestly influence, concluding that the above material, "both piyyutim and Hekhalot tracts, suggests that there may have been a link between these and other priestly circles and the shaping of a synagogue mosaic floor such as the one in Sepphoris" (ibid., 129).

317 Elior, *Three Temples*, 49, 191.

318 See Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion," 170 (n. 255 above). Also see G. Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. J. Neusner, E. S. Frerichs, and P. V. McCracken Flesher (New York, 1989), 185–225; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 104–5 (n. 10 above). Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 17–18 (n. 3 above), notes that theurgy describes rituals or actions that involve the deity, whereas words about the deity are called theology. However, Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 110, cautions that "Merkavah mysticism is neither a magical nor a theurgic experience."

319 See Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion," 175. Also see Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 70: "Priestly status seems to be the key to this ascent, because the reciters are the earthly parallels to the heavenly priests."

320 Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 9, 26–27 (n. 245 above).

321 Schäfer, "Jewish Magic Literature," 77 (n. 213 above).

322 M. D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Tübingen, 1992), 7, 11.

323 Swartz, *Mystical Prayer*, 11. Similarly, Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 67, notes that ascent was achieved primarily through the repetition of vowel sounds and divine names.

324 Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 76–77. Also see Newsom, "Mysticism," 594 (n. 188 above): "The representation of heaven as a temple served by angelic priests, central to the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, is not prominent in later *heikhalot* texts. Whereas the *heikhalot* tradition contains the texts of long hymns praising God, Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice are much more concerned with describing the angels in the act of praising God than they are with quoting the words of praise uttered by the angels."

as rhythmical patterns and phrasing that are characteristic of early piyyutim.[325] They also parallel liturgical literature of the rabbinic period, although they are not identical in content with prayers known from standard Jewish liturgy.[326]

The revelation of cosmic secrets is a common theme in the Enochic traditions. These secrets gave Enoch knowledge of the past, present, and future, which is why Metatron is referred to as "the lesser YHWH."[327] References to secrets are especially common in the Sar ha-Torah texts. The secrets consist of not only Torah knowledge but the magical means to acquire it.[328] A passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati* states that "he adjured me by the great seal and the great oath that belong to Zekhuriel Yahweh, God of Israel, who is Metatron Yahweh, God of Israel, God of heaven and God of earth, God of all the gods, God of the sea and God of the dry land. He revealed the method of the secret of the Torah."[329] Some texts describe the invocation of names as a means of obtaining these secrets: "Any student [*talmid*] who knows that what he learns does not stay with him should stand and say a blessing, rise and speak an adjuration, in the name of Margobiel Giwat'el Ziwat'el Tanariel Hozhaya Sin Sagan Sobir'uhu, all of whom are Metatron.... Blessed be the wise one who knows secrets, the master of mysteries. R. Ishmael said: How should a person make use of this? He should count on his fingers as he speaks the names, one hundred and eleven times."[330] The same desire to obtain secret Torah knowledge is expressed in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*'s collection of prayers, which opens as follows: "Be praised forever. At the Throne of Glory You dwell, in the Chambers on high, and the exalted Hekhal. For you have revealed the secrets and the deepest of secrets, and the hidden things, and the most hidden things to Moses, and Moses to Israel. So that they can engage in Torah within them, and increase study with them."[331]

The Ein Gedi Synagogue

That the secret of Torah knowledge was imparted by Metatron or another super-angel to the entire community and not just to the adept is suggested by the Ein Gedi synagogue inscription (fig. 6).[332] The list of names at the beginning of the inscription is followed by a passage that has been the subject of much discussion: "Anyone causing a controversy between a man and his friend, or whoever slanders his friend before the Gentiles, or whoever steals the property of his friend, or whoever reveals the secret of the town to the Gentiles—He whose eyes range through the whole earth and Who sees hidden things, He will set his face on that man and on his seed and will uproot him from under the heavens."[333] Most discussions have focused on the reference to "the secret of the town."[334] Ephraim Urbach suggested that the secret of the community should be understood within the context of oaths imposed on religious societies, guilds, and citizens of a Greek polis in antiquity. The Ein Gedi inscription would therefore refer to a civic oath imposed on the members of the town. Benjamin Mazar interpreted the town's secret as relating to various political alliances. Dating the inscription to the early seventh century, he suggested that the Persian-Byzantine conflict of 614 created political controversies among the members of the community. The revealing of the town's secret is a reference to the town's divided loyalties. A. Dothan suggested that the events behind this inscription are religious and relate to the restrictions imposed by Justinian in the sixth century on the reading of the Torah and the study of Oral Law. Dothan believed that the Jewish community hid their Torah scrolls, and that this is the "secret" referred to in this inscription. Saul Lieberman proposed the interpretation that has gained the widest acceptance. He understood this as a reference to the secrets of the balsam industry, which was centered in Ein

325 Swartz, *Mystical Prayer*, 12, 197. Also see idem, *Scholastic Magic*, 219 (n. 7 above): "Affinities between the creativity of the liturgical poets (*payetanim*) and composers of Merkavah hymnology has [sic] been shown, and these circles could have nurtured other esoteric activity such as that of the Sar ha-Torah literature."

326 Swartz, *Mystical Prayer*, 34. Also see Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 67 n. 30: "Some rabbinic circles may have actively repressed liturgy that they felt was not sufficiently under their control or did not represent their interests."

327 Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, 97 (n. 97 above); Segal, "Paul," 107 (n. 230 above); Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 11 (n. 10 above). See, for example, Odeberg, *3 Enoch* (n. 167 above), 30–31 (3 Enoch 11.1): "R. Ishmael said: Metatron, the angel, the Prince of the Presence, said to me: Henceforth the Holy One, blessed be he, revealed to me all the mysteries of the Tora and all other secrets of wisdom and all the depths of the Perfect Law; and all living beings' thoughts of heart and all the secrets of the universe and all the secrets of Creation were revealed unto me even as they are revealed unto the Maker of Creation."

328 Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 227.

329 From Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 376–77 (n. 117 above); for another example see p. 432.

330 From ibid., 378.

331 Swartz, *Mystical Prayer*, 108; also see p. 110.

332 Similarly, the Sar ha-Torah texts emphasize that the name of God is available "to all Israel." See Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 205.

333 Levine, "Inscription," 140 (n. 218 above).

334 For the following interpretations with references, see Levine, "Inscription," 145.

Gedi. Lieberman reasoned that given the fame of this product, its cultivation and preparation might have been regarded as a trade secret not to be divulged to outsiders.[335]

In my opinion, the fact that the Ein Gedi inscription opens with a list of names in Hebrew including the thirteen ancestors of the world, the signs of the zodiac, and the four seasons suggests that "the secret of the town" refers to the revelation of Torah knowledge to the community, presumably through the invocation of the divine name or names.[336] In fact, the word *razah* in this inscription is the same one used for mysteries or secrets in the Sar ha-Torah texts.[337] The aim of adjuration in these works is the complete command of the Torah and insight into its hidden secrets.[338] A Sar ha-Panim text contains a curse that recalls the Ein Gedi inscription: "Sar ha-Panim said to me [R. Ishmael], 'I reveal to you this secret, and everyone who reveals it to someone who is not worthy perishes from this world."[339] Therefore the secret of the town (Aramaic *razah deqartah*) mentioned in the Ein Gedi inscription may be the secret of access to or control of Torah knowledge, which was imparted to the community through the rituals conducted inside the synagogue.

Elior views hekhalot literature as a response of the displaced Zadokite priesthood to the destruction of the Temple:

Faced with the unbridgeable distance between the ruined Temple and the discontinued earthly cult, on the one hand, and the yearning to approach the sacred realm...on the other, mystical tradition created a bridge of verbal remembrance, built out of speech and song, measurement and number, mythical imagination and mystical vision. Through a visionary metamorphosis of the priestly Temple traditions, Merkavah tradition erected seven supernal sanctuaries, heikhalot, in which the descender to the merkavah could observe the ongoing sacred service performed by twenty-four divisions of angels, and then return to testify to the continuity of cult in heaven, as if rejecting the destruction witnessed on earth.[340]

Halperin has suggested that the lavish descriptions of the heavenly structures in hekhalot literature may be best understood as "a Jewish answer to the splendid religious edifices built by Constantine and his successors, which both advertised the church's victory on earth and symbolized its greater unseen glories. In this world Jews could hardly hope to compete. But what they could not build on earth their fantasy let them build in heaven.... The need for such fantasies may have been one of the motives that generated the Hekhalot literature."[341] The disappointment among the Jewish population following the premature death of Julian the Apostate in 363, which stopped the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, may also have contributed to the increasing popularity of the concept of a heavenly Temple, a concept that is paralleled in Christianity.[342]

335 According to M. Weinfeld, the administration of oaths as described in this inscription "strengthens the conclusion that we are speaking here of an oath administered by the people of the town to the heads of the craft guild (of spice-makers), Yosa, 'Ezron, and Hizzikiyyo. This oath was preserved for posterity within the mosaic made by the members of the guild in memory of its leaders and founders"; see *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect* (Fribourg, 1986), 64. However, immediately after this he discusses an injunction to the members of a Jewish-Christian sect not to reveal the lore of sacred books, that is, esoteric knowledge (ibid., 67–68). I believe that the secret mentioned in the Ein Gedi inscription should be understood in a similar way.

336 Fassbeck, "Vom Mosaik zur Magie," 104 (n. 218 above), has noted that this part of the inscription resembles a curse, and suggests interpreting it as evidence for magical practices (analogous to the use of amulets).

337 For an interesting example, see Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, 82–83: "You revealed [the secrets]...to all Israel, so that the children of Israel can engage in Torah within them, and increase study with them, and recite before you each and every secret.... Blessed are You, YHWH, the Sage of all mysteries (*Hakham ha-razim*) and Lord of all secrets."

338 See Schäfer, "Jewish Magic Literature," 77 (n. 213 above).

339 From Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, 74 (n. 15 above).

340 *Three Temples*, 259 (n. 10 above).

341 *Faces of the Chariot*, 353–54 (n. 117 above); also see p. 448.

342 See Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 301 (n. 192 above).

Mysticism in Early Christianity

Metatron and Christ

Similar magical and mystical beliefs and practices were apparently widespread among the contemporary Christian population.[343] For example, Origen's first *Homily on Ezekiel* refers to angels descending to aid and support believers.[344] An early Christian apocalyptic work called *The Ascension of Isaiah* describes Isaiah's vision of Christ's descent to earth and subsequent triumphant ascent. In the seventh heaven, Isaiah is transformed into an angel and joins the angels in worshipping Christ.[345] A Syriac-Christian work titled *The Acts of Thomas* refers to Christ as "the discloser of hidden secrets."[346] Adela Yarbro Collins and Alan Segal each have documented evidence of Jewish mysticism in Paul's experience.[347] Like Enoch, Paul claims to have gazed on the glory of God, whom Paul identifies as the Christ, as expressed in 2 Corinthians 4:3–6: "And even if our gospel is veiled it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ."[348] Segal even identifies Paul as an "early mystical-apocalyptic adept."[349]

The possibility that the Helios-Metatron figure in synagogue mosaics parallels the Christ Pantokrator in the domes of Middle Byzantine churches finds support in a suggestion that the Arian Christ is analogous to the Metatron of hekhalot literature.[350] Just as Christ assumed the form of God, so he also received the divine name YHWH, which is *kyrios* or *Lord* in Greek.[351] Gedaliah Stroumsa has demonstrated that the Jewish concept of Metatron was applied to Christ in some trends of earliest Christianity.[352] In fact Christians used the term *synthronos*, which is roughly synonymous with Metatron (*metathronos*), as a title for Jesus.[353] Similarly Collins has noted that the author of Revelation understood the phrases "the ancient of days" and "the one like a son of man" in Daniel 7:13 as Christ exalted to the status of the principal angel, God's agent in anthropomorphic form.[354] Apparently, after Jesus's death his followers identified him with the heavenly figure of Daniel because of his exaltation to heaven.[355] Works such as 1 Enoch 48–49 (*The Similitudes of Enoch*) suggest that some Jews identified the same figure ("the son of man") with Enoch.[356] Maria Fabricius

343 For example, the mystical nature of the festival of Shavuot, which was associated in the Zadokite priestly literature with the theophany on Mount Sinai and merkavah revelation, is preserved in the New Testament tradition as the Pentecost. This festival commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit in connection with the revelation of Ezekiel's merkavah or the theophany at Sinai; see Elior, *Three Temples*, 154–58, 227. Also see Halperin, *Merkabah*, 130 (n. 235 above). I exclude from this discussion a consideration of Gnosticism and the Christian Gnostic manuscripts from Nag Hammadi, since this would considerably expand the scope of this study and the connections between early Jewish mysticism and Gnosticism have already been well explored.

344 Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 332–33.

345 Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, 55 (n. 97 above).

346 Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," 12 (n. 229 above).

347 See Segal, "Paul," 95–122 (n. 230 above), and *Paul the Convert*, 34–71 (n. 295 above); Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 13 (n. 76 above), citing 2 Corinthians 12:2–5.

348 From Segal, "Paul," 111. Also see idem, *Paul the Convert*, 10–11, 39; Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," 11. On the other hand, P. Shäfer denies that "Paul's ecstatic experience participates in the wide stream of Jewish (and finally Christian) mystical experience..."; see "New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkavah Mysticism," *JJS* 35 (1984): 19–35.

349 *Paul the Convert*, 22.

350 See Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 453.

351 Segal, "Paul," 112, and *Paul the Convert*, 62. Also see idem, *Two Powers*, 212–13 (n. 106 above): "It seems safe to consider that many Christians identified the Christ with God's principal angel, who carried the divine name."

352 Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God," 283–84 (n. 230 above).

353 See Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 241 (n. 10 above). Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 43, observes that the term *Metatron*, which is what the rabbis usually call God's principal angel, is probably not a proper name but instead is a title adapted from the Greek word *metathronos* (one who stands after or behind the throne). In this way the rabbis reduced the principal angel's status, so that instead of sharing the throne with God (*synthronos*), he was made to stand after or behind the throne (for rabbinic opposition to the elevated status of Metatron, see below). See also n. 231, above.

354 Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 176–84. Also see Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 41, who notes that "a human figure on the divine throne is described in Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7, and Exodus 24, among other places, and was blended into a consistent picture of a principal mediator figure who, like the angel of the Lord in Exodus 23, embodied, personified, or carried the name of God, YHWH, the tetragrammaton. This figure, elaborated on by Jewish tradition, would become a central metaphor for Christ in Christianity."

355 Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 196.

356 Ibid., 156, 196; Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 46–47.

Hansen has pointed out that light played a prominent role in Christian basilicas, as a metaphor for Christ.[357] This brings to mind the prominent position of the Helios figure in Palestinian synagogue mosaics and perhaps provides additional evidence for parallels between Helios-Metatron and Christ.

357 *Eloquence of Appropriation*, 139, 147 (n. 89 above).

The Church as a Temple

As we have seen, the Syriac hymn on Hagia Sophia in Edessa indicates that by the mid-sixth century the interiors of church buildings were conceived of as mirroring the cosmos.[358] This hymn also suggests some points of similarity between Jewish and Christian mystical concepts. For example it opens by referring to the church as a holy Temple (Syriac *haykla*). The use of this term not only reflects the early Christian understanding of the church building as a temple but suggests possible parallels with the concept of heavenly hekhalot in Judaism.[359] In addition "mysteries" (Syriac *raze*) are mentioned several times in the hymn, including once in reference to the names of the Trinity: "And announces to us the mystery (*raza*) of the Trinity, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."[360] Another strophe refers to "the throne of Christ and the nine orders of angels."[361] McVey describes the Edessa hymn as "an architectural *theoria*, a contemplation of the church building."[362] The building is understood as representing "the mysteries of the Godhead" and the cosmos.[363] According to McVey, "The fundamental theological postulate underlying the hymn is that God is a mystery, who is both hidden and revealed.... Contemplating the mysterious God is accessible through the contemplation of the church building."[364] The term θεωρία derives from early Byzantine biblical commentaries and Byzantine liturgical commentaries, where it refers to the contemplation of the sacred text at the highest spiritual level. The Edessa hymn suggests that the contemplation of the interior of the building provided a means of ascent to God, analogous to participation in the Eucharist, an act that took place inside the building.[365]

358 McVey, "Domed Church," 109 (n. 90 above).

359 Ibid., 96.

360 Ibid., 95, str. 11; 97–98; 103.

361 Ibid., 95, str. 19. McVey (ibid., 119) notes that "both Pseudo-Dionysius and the Edessa Hymn belong to a broader context in which mystical and cosmological interest [sic] are not uncommon."

362 Ibid., 110.

363 Ibid., 109.

364 Ibid., 110.

365 Ibid.

A number of early Christian writers draw analogies between the Jerusalem Temple and church buildings in conceptualizing the cosmos. In Ephrem the Syrian's cycle of *Hymns on Paradise*, the Tabernacle is the symbol of Paradise. Since church buildings are equated with the Temple, they also symbolize the cosmos and Paradise.[366] Theodore of Mopsuestia conceived of the Tabernacle, which was divided by a veil into an inner and outer area, as an exact model of the cosmos. The lower world, which is temporal and spatial, is the dwelling place of humans. The upper world is the dwelling place of angels and the eschatological home of humans.[367] In his *Life of Moses*, Gregory of Nyssa interpreted the furnishings of the heavenly Temple as angels and the furnishings of the earthly Temple as the members of the church in their various liturgical roles.[368] A Syriac poem composed by Balai in the early fifth century on the occasion of the rededication of the church at Qennesrin (Beroea) describes the building as the dwelling place of God and "heaven on earth." The manner in which Balai compared the service of the priests to the ministry of the angels recalls the earthly service of the priests and their angelic counterparts in the hekhalot texts.[369]

366 Ibid., 112.

367 Ibid., 113.

368 Ibid., 113–14.

369 Ibid., 120.

The Rainbow and a "Second Power" in Heaven

An Early Byzantine mosaic dating to the second half of the fifth century is preserved in the apse of the Church of Hosios David in Thessalonike.[370] The subject of the mosaic is Ezekiel's vision, a popular theme in early Christian art.[371] Christ is enthroned on a rainbow and is surrounded by a luminous cloud of

370 For a mid-5th century date, see Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, 116 (n. 82 above). Krautheimer, *Architecture*, 253 (n. 82 above), dates the church to the last third of the 5th century ("shortly before 500").

371 Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, 116.

light.[372] Mathews interprets this cloud of light as a mandorla and the enthroned image as "theandric," that is, a god-man image.[373] The winged "living creatures" that Ezekiel saw in his vision emerge from the sides of the cloud. Habakkuk and Ezekiel are seated among rocks in the corners of the mosaic. Ezekiel, who is on the left, shields his eyes from this apparition of Christ.[374] Halperin has noted that whereas the rabbis were not disturbed by the anthropomorphism of God in Ezekiel 1:26–28, they rejected the notion that the rainbow is a visible manifestation of God's glory.[375] This equation, however, is found in some hekhalot texts.[376] One passage discussed by Halperin recalls the mosaic from Hosios David. This passage first mentions a "youth" (*na'ar*) or "prince" (*sar*) who represents a manifestation of God. This figure has various angelic names including Metatron, and he is compared to a rainbow: "His body resembles the rainbow, and the rainbow resembles *the appearance of fire all around it* [Ezekiel 1:27]."[377] These parallels support the identification of the Helios figure in synagogue mosaics as Metatron, who, like Christ, was considered a god-man or "lesser YHWH." Like Metatron and other super-angels, the rainbow functioned as a mediator between God and humanity by spanning heaven and earth.[378]

Rabbis may have opposed magical or mystical practices partly because of Christianity's elevation of Christ to the status of a second divine power. Some rabbis apparently objected to the development of a similar phenomenon in Judaism.[379] This may be one reason that rabbinic sources regard Metatron with suspicion and try to downgrade his status.[380] This attitude is evident in a passage from the Babylonian Talmud (Hagigah 15a), which describes how the heretic Elisha ben 'Avuyah mistook Metatron for a second divine power because like God, Metatron was enthroned in heaven:[381] "What did he [Elisha ben 'Avuyah] actually do? He saw Metatron, who was given permission to sit and write the merits of the people in Israel. He [Elisha] said: We have learnt that up in heaven there is no one sitting..., can it be that there are two *reshuyot* (= two Gods)? So they pulled Metatron out and beat him with sixty lashes of fire. They asked him, 'Why didn't you stand up when you saw him [Elisha ben 'Avuyah]?'"[382]

The book of Revelation provides further evidence for mysticism in early Christianity. For example, chapter 12 opens: "Then a great portent appeared in the sky—a woman clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." The twelve stars in the woman's crown represent the zodiac, with the sun as her garment and the moon as her footstool.[383] Another passage in Revelation (22:2–3) describes the tree of life bearing twelve kinds of fruit, one in each month, alluding to the signs of the zodiac. It is followed by a reference to the "throne of God and the Lamb."

372 Ibid., 116–17.

373 Ibid., 117.

374 Ibid., 116.

375 Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 250 (n. 117 above). For discussions of the relevant rabbinic passages, see ibid., 57, and *Merkabah*, 108–28 (n. 235 above).

376 According to Elior, *Three Temples*, 140, 148–49, 156 (n. 10 above), in the Zadokite tradition the seven-colored rainbow symbolized God's covenant with his people and was connected with the festival of Shavuot.

377 Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 258.

378 Ibid., 259, 261.

379 Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 183 (n. 76 above); Segal, "Paul," 112–13 (n. 230 above); idem, *Paul the Convert*, 45–46 (n. 295 above); Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 37, 42 (n. 245 above); Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," 14 (n. 229 above); Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 93 (n. 10 above). Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 33–34, 36, notes that in hekhalot literature, the divine name became the property of many celestial powers, and the unique characteristics of the divinity were attributed to other divine forces. Thus the distinctions between God and God's princes were blurred. This development replaced a monotheistic tradition with a polytheistic-visionary myth.

380 Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 200: "Some of the Palestinian sages of the third century expressed negative views about Enoch." VanderKam, *Enoch*, 161–62 (n. 222 above), notes that Enoch is rarely mentioned in rabbinic literature. In addition the identification of Enoch with Metatron is not found in the Talmuds or in early midrashic literature; see Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," 9–10. Also see Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 90–96 (n. 167 above). Elior, *Three Temples*, 221, 240, notes that the rabbis belittled Enoch and portrayed him in a negative light. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 51, observes that both rabbinic writings and hekhalot literature regard the divinization of Metatron as a heresy, consistent with rabbinic understandings of biblical passages.

381 Segal, *Two Powers*, 9 (n. 106 above). Elisha was disrespectfully nicknamed *Aher* (Other) by the rabbis. Segal (ibid., 70) explains that the rabbis did not object to believing in angels (which they acknowledged), but considered as heretical the belief that a certain principal angel was a special mediator between God and humans. From their point of view, the charge of heresy extended to Jewish merkavah mystics, Christians, and gnostics. Segal (ibid., 147) notes that the heresy of the "two powers in heaven" was almost entirely confined to Palestine, which is the only region where synagogues decorated with Helios and the zodiac have been found.

382 From Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 90; also see Halperin, *Merkabah*, 168 (n. 235 above); Elior, *Three Temples*, 240. Also see Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 44–45. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 200, notes that Enoch could have been understood as prefiguring the ascension of Christ.

383 Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 108, 130 (n. 76 above).

The vision in the book of Revelation describes a new Jerusalem that is illuminated and gives light, just as the sun and moon give light to the earth. But in this new creation, there will be no more sun and moon because of the illuminating presence of God and the Lamb. The temporary lights that move and change will be replaced by permanent, unchanging luminaries. Like the sea, sun, and moon, the zodiac also apparently does not exist in this new creation. The symbolism of light is transferred from the sun and moon to God or Christ.[384] This vision of the new Jerusalem may explain why the zodiac cycle was not used in Christian iconography. Instead, Christ or a Lamb, the new heavenly luminaries, are represented in the center of the dome or vault of church buildings.[385]

Halperin has noted that hekhalot literature indulges "in anthropomorphism to a degree that must be unsurpassed, and perhaps unequaled, in any of the literature of the Judaic religions."[386] The authors of these works converted visionary concepts into anthropomorphic celestial beings.[387] I believe this tendency was given visual expression in the synagogue mosaics, in particular in the representation of the Helios-Metatron figure.

Number Symbolism and the Ordering of Time

Calculating the End of Time

The appearance of Helios-Metatron and the zodiac cycle in synagogues might also represent a Jewish response to the Christians' replacement of the Roman civil calendar with the church calendar.[388] Oded Irshai has noted an increase in messianic or eschatological expectations among the Jewish and Christian populations of Palestine in the fifth and sixth centuries.[389] The cyclical and regular nature of the solar calendar made it possible to calculate the dates of important events, both past and future, including the arrival of the messiah.[390] Numbers are used in apocalyptic literature to calculate the end, with a view to persuading the reader that the end is near. However, numbers were rarely used to predict the exact date of the eschaton.[391] Instead, like the solar calendar, they alluded to an idealized ordering of time. Numbers are also used in Jewish apocalyptic literature to discern meaningful patterns in time.[392] For example, in 4 Ezra 14:11–12, the age from the time of creation to the messianic era is divided into twelve parts.[393] The numbers used most frequently to create patterns in time are seven, four, twelve, and ten.[394] Twelve alludes to the hours of the day and the months of the year as well as the twelve tribes and probably finds visual expression in the signs of the zodiac in mosaic floors. The number four alludes to the four seasons and the four corners of the earth. The number seven refers to the seven days of the week and the seven planets and was symbolized by the menorah.[395] The most meaningful numbers—seven, twelve, and four—are alluded to repeatedly in the synagogue mosaics by depictions of the menorah, the zodiac, and the seasons. The Sepphoris mosaic, which has the most explicit Temple imagery of any synagogue floor discovered so far, is divided into seven registers.

384 Ibid., 133, 175.

385 At San Vitale in Ravenna, the figure of a lamb is depicted in the center of the chancel vault, in the midst of stars in a medallion held aloft by four angels. These mosaics convey the concept that the interior of the church is the cosmos, God's created world. For example, the four blue spheres on which the peacocks stand in the corners of the vault are differentiated by larger and smaller areas of light and might therefore represent astronomical phases. The four gold crosses placed in medallions on the north and south walls of the chancel may refer to the cardinal points; see Maguire, *Earth and Ocean*, 77–78 (n. 80 above). See also n. 93, above.

386 *Faces of the Chariot*, 406. For the acceptance of anthropomorphism among the tannaim and amoraim, see Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism*, 31 (n. 238 above). For early Christian condemnation of Jewish anthropomorphism, see Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God," 269–88 (n. 230 above).

387 Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 23 (n. 245 above).

388 See Irshai, "Byzantine Period," 115 (n. 121 above). Talgam, "Similarities and Differences," 101 (n. 51 above), revives an earlier proposal by A. G. Sternberg connecting the first appearance of the Helios and zodiac cycle (at Hammath Tiberias) with Hillel II's publication of the rules for fixing the calendar. During the 4th century, the rabbis adopted a fixed (instead of empirical) calendar. This happened less than a century after the Christians instituted a fixed calendar in order to establish a uniform Easter cycle. For another discussion of this issue, see Levine, "Contextualizing Jewish Art," 110–15 (n. 17 above). Stern suggests that the adoption of a fixed calendar by the rabbis at this time indicates that they might have been influenced by the standardization of the Christian calendar; see *Calendar and Community*, 222–26, 236 (n. 170 above).

389 "Byzantine Period," 117. Also see Himmelfarb, "Mother of the Messiah," 374 (n. 67 above): "In fourth-century Palestine it should not be surprising to find Jews engaged in similar efforts to supply Judaism with a messianic scenario to rival that of the Christians." Himmelfarb suggests that the Jerusalem Talmud contains a rabbinic response to a popular Jewish story about the messiah in an attempt to undermine Jewish messianic hopes (ibid., 379).

390 See Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology*, 106–7, 217–75 (n. 151 above); Elior, "Jewish Calendar," 35 (n. 158 above).

391 Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 69, 135 (n. 76 above).

392 Ibid., 69.

393 Ibid., 78.

394 Ibid., 89.

395 For the use of these numbers in the book of Revelation see ibid., 119. Naturally the number three also had great significance for Christians.

Cosmic ordering is especially common in Enochic literature. Enoch's ability to interpret the heavenly signs (astronomy/astrology) meant that he could also predict the future.[396] For example, *The Book of the Heavenly Luminaries* (1 Enoch 72–82) focuses on astronomical "laws" such as the movement of the sun during the twelve months of the year. The importance of these laws is that they provide the necessary information for establishing the correct calendar.[397] The sun is associated with six gates in the east in which it rises and six in the west in which it sets (1 Enoch 72.2–3). The sun moves through these twelve gates in the course of a year. The twelve "gates" are apparently a reference to the signs of the zodiac. There are also twelve winds, each with its own gate, which are associated with the four quarters of the earth: east, west, south, and north.[398] According to Elior, the set times of God, which were grouped in sevens, and the set times of nature, which were grouped in fours, depended on the solar calendar.[399] This system of numbering is expressed visually in the synagogue mosaics by the signs of the zodiac and the four seasons. Thus the connection between Helios-Metatron and the zodiac cycle and the ordering of time might also express Jewish messianic or eschatological expectations. These expectations apparently developed roughly at the same time as similar eschatological hopes developed among the contemporary Christian population.

According to Hansen, "An aspect of early Christian architecture which it is practically impossible to over-interpret involves measure and numbers, whose figurative understanding occupied a prominent role in the era."[400] The author of the book of Revelation used the numbering of people, objects, and events to demonstrate that nothing is random or accidental.[401] Number symbolism also occurs throughout the mid-sixth-century Syriac hymn on the cathedral church of Edessa, including references to the four ends of the earth, the Trinity, and the five virgins.[402] For some Jews, the solar calendar seems to have expressed a similar concept. The fact that everything is measured and counted is a result of God's control. In other words, the ordering of the cosmos is a reflection of the divine plan, which will be revealed to those who conform to this order.[403] The synagogue mosaics depicting Helios and the zodiac cycle may visually express this concept, as described by Elior: "The exact sequence of the weekly cycles of [priestly] courses and the annual cycles of service were bound up with the priestly conception of time as a cyclic reflection of an eternal divine order. This cyclic time and the ritual order associated with it were determined by permanent, eternal, numerical patterns, which were of paramount importance in priestly tradition; thus the priests were charged with maintaining the regularity of the terrestrial world and the cycles of cosmic order."[404] The successors of the Zadokite priests believed that this deterministic mode of calendrical calculation had been entrusted to them by divine authority. It was opposed by the rabbis, who based their concept of reckoning time on human observation.[405]

Conclusion

To summarize I propose that Helios and the zodiac cycle symbolized sacred time and sacred space, which were united inside the synagogue building—the meeting place of heaven and earth—during the services and rituals conducted there.[406] This decorative program is a visual expression of the concepts described by Elior, the common thematic denominator of which is the merkavah, the chariot-throne of God that symbolized the divine order of creation. On the one hand, Helios and the zodiac cycle represent the sun and the solar calendar and the four seasons, alluding to cyclical, immutable, sacred time. On the other hand, Helios and the zodiac cycle allude to the vertical dimension of sacred

396 Elior, "Jewish Calendar," 38.

397 Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 102.

398 Ibid., 103.

399 *Three Temples*, 3, 42 (n. 10 above). Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 103, noted that in *The Book of the Heavenly Luminaries*, wherever the number twelve appears, heavenly phenomena are discussed.

400 *Eloquence of Appropriation*, 204 (n. 89 above).

401 Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 137.

402 McVey, "Domed Church," 95, 100 (n. 90 above).

403 Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 137.

404 Elior, *Three Temples*, 2.

405 Ibid., 5.

406 For a similar view, see Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 259 (n. 51 above): "The synagogue often seems to have constituted an unearthly realm, a reflection of the holy temple." However, Schwartz (ibid., 273 n. 86) rejects the possibility of priestly influence in late antique synagogues.

space: Helios also represented Metatron, the super-angel or "lesser YHWH"; the zodiac cycle represented the twelve heavenly gates that gave access to the seven heavens, the seven hekhalot, and the ongoing services conducted by twenty-four divisions of ministering angels; and the four seasons alluded to the four sides of the divine chariot-throne.[407] Sacred time and sacred space were united inside the walls of the synagogue in rituals that were performed by priests or by adepts who had assumed a priestly role on earth and in the heavens by angels, perpetuating the now-defunct Temple cult through its angelic counterpart.[408]

The development of monumental synagogue architecture and art in Palestine beginning in the fourth century should be understood against the background of Christian attempts to appropriate the Jewish heritage. This phenomenon is illustrated by the Jewish and Christian use of the Aqedah story in art and literature, which is conceptualized by Jews as the *offering* or *binding* of Isaac and by Christians as the *sacrifice* of Isaac. In Jewish exegesis of the first century BCE to the first century CE, the story of the Aqedah was understood as referring to the persecution and martyrdom of Jews. Early Christians transformed the meaning of the story by identifying the martyred figure as the messiah, that is, as a prototype or prefiguration of Jesus.[409] As Alan Segal noted, "There is no historical evidence for an expectation of a crucified or suffering messiah until the events of Jesus' life proved to the early church that this was the true and secret meaning of scripture. All discussions of suffering in the Bible thereafter take on a new meaning, as prophecies of Jesus' suffering. But no Jew would have seen them in this way before Jesus' crucifixion."[410] Martha Himmelfarb describes this phenomenon as "competitive interpretation" between Jews and Christians.[411]

Early Palestinian synagogue assemblies were held in simple buildings like the ones at Gamala and Masada, which consist of an unadorned room surrounded by benches with no permanent liturgical furniture.[412] With the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century, Christians began to build monumental churches decorated with elaborate decorative programs throughout the empire, including around Palestine. Christianity sought to legitimize itself by appropriating the Jewish heritage. At the same time, the Jews of Palestine began to construct monumental synagogue buildings with special furniture (such as a platform for the Torah shrine) to accommodate increasingly elaborate liturgical needs.[413] These synagogues were decorated with figured images, an innovation in Jewish art. Figured images were not a feature of Jewish art in Palestine during the Second Temple period because of the perceived threat of idolatry and because pagan religions did not try to appropriate the Jewish heritage.[414]

In our technology-oriented and image-laden society, it is easy to overlook the visual impact that the Helios-Metatron figure and other images in the synagogues must have had on ancient viewers. These images evoked the most

407 See Elior, *Three Temples*, 30–31. The menorah also alluded to the dimension of time: the seven days of the weeks and Sabbaths of days, etc.; and the dimension of space: the seven firmaments, seven hekhalot, etc.

408 See ibid., 31. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 272, has noted that some of the piyyutim "retain the idea that earthly ritual mirrors cosmic ritual."

409 Segal, *Other Judaisms*, 117–19 (n. 199 above).

410 Ibid., 127. For the influence of the concept of martyrdom in early Christianity on rabbinic Judaism, see Boyarin, *Dying for God* (n. 6 above). Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 71 (n. 60 above), describes the manner in which the Christian clergy and theologians treated the Hebrew Bible as "a kind of literary despoliation."

411 Himmelfarb, "Mother of the Messiah," 374 (n. 67 above). In many cases, the *rabbinic* response to Christianity was not competitive imitation, but deliberate avoidance (ibid., 38).

412 For the synagogue at Masada, see E. Netzer, *Masada III, The Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965, Final Reports: The Buildings, Stratigraphy and Architecture* (Jerusalem, 1991), 402–13. For the synagogue at Gamala, see S. Gutman, "The Synagogue at Gamla," in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 30–34 (n. 13 above).

413 Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 179, has recently argued that "one of the main causes of the rejudaization of the Jews was the christianization of the Roman Empire." According to Schwartz, the process of christianization marginalized the Jews. The Jews reacted by appropriating "much from the Christian society around them." Although I agree with Schwartz on the last point, I disagree with his thesis that between the two revolts and the 4th century, "Judaism may have been little more than a vestigial identity, bits and pieces of which they [most Jews] were happy to incorporate into a religious and cultural system that was essentially Greco-Roman and pagan" (ibid., 15). Schwartz dismisses the possibility of a revival of priestly prominence in late antiquity (ibid., 273 n. 273).

414 One unresolved issue concerns late-antique synagogues that were not decorated with Helios and the zodiac cycle. Can we identify similar phenomena and traditions—priestly connections and adjuration practices—also in buildings that were not decorated with Helios and the zodiac cycle? Or do different types of architectural forms or decorative motifs point to different types of rituals or leadership or even different Jewish movements or groups within the synagogue setting? Although I do not have answers to these questions, the discovery of plaques listing the priestly courses, inscriptions mentioning priests as donors, and Temple imagery (menorahs etc.) at various sites without the Helios and zodiac cycle suggests to me that priestly interests are reflected in other synagogue buildings in Palestine (and perhaps in the Diaspora).

potent forces in Judaism: the salvation offered through the Temple cult, the mysteries of God's creation, and divine revelation. Peter Brown has recently pointed out that the figures decorating the interiors of Early Byzantine churches were not intended to be "read" as messages. Instead, they were understood as real physical presences that elicited the appropriate physical gestures of respect and adoration, such as bowing and kissing. This means that early Christians treated these images in a similar fashion to the way pagans treated representations of their deities—as if they were alive.[415] This type of behavior was apparently the subject of debate between Jews and Christians, as expressed in *The Disputation of Sergios the Stylite against a Jew* (14.14–15): "'Tell me, if you enter and worship before a king do you worship a provincial governor...or all the order of ranks with the same (position of the head) with which you have worshipped the king?'...The Jew said, 'It is impossible for me to change the (position of my) head according to each one as they are lifted up and brought low. So I worship the king and the lower ranks with the same (position of the) head."[416] In other words, the Christian response to the Jewish charge of idolatry was that the gestures used for showing respect and adoration could easily be confused with idol worship.[417] A passage from the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to Leviticus 26:1 that is frequently cited by scholars in discussions of ancient synagogue art reflects a similar concern: "You shall not make idols for yourselves; you shall not erect for yourselves images or pillars to bow down (to them), and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bend down to it. However, you may put a pavement decorated with figures and images in the floors of your sanctuaries; but not to bow down to it."[418] This suggests that the images in the mosaic floors of ancient synagogues were understood as real physical presences by the congregation, causing concern among some Jewish leaders that the fine line between gestures of adoration and idolatry was being crossed.[419]

Brown notes that the figured images in late antique churches were, "quite literally, wrapped around the person to such an extent that [they] could not be wrenched away, so as to become a distanced object of contemplation.... Though they took the form of images, their principal function was not to summon the visual attention of their human users but to ward off demons and to attract angels."[420] The purpose of these images was not to communicate messages but to bring protective power down from heaven and evoke a sense of Paradise for the worshipper.[421] The viewer's sense of closeness to the images is expressed in an early fifth-century poem by Paulinus of Nola, in which he describes the decoration inside a local basilica: "In full mystery sparkles the Trinity: Christ stands as a lamb, the voice of the Father thunders down from heaven and in the form of a dove the Holy Ghost flows [sic] down. The Cross is surrounded by a wreath, a bright circle, and around this circle the apostles form a ring, represented in a chorus of doves. The holy unity of the Trinity meets in Christ, but the Trinity has threefold symbolism."[422]

Brown believes that a shift in the perception of imagery in Christian art occurred during the early Middle Ages, with a "watershed" in the late sixth century.[423] As a result, images came to be "read"—that is, viewed—instead of being understood as living beings.[424] Perhaps it is no coincidence that no new figured mosaics were laid in synagogues after the end of the sixth century.[425] Many scholars believe that this is a result of the Iconoclast movement. However, Brown's observation suggests additional factors. These include an increased emphasis on the written word and text, which were preferred by the Christian élites of early medieval times because images could easily be misunderstood

415 P. Brown, "Images as a Substitute for Writing," in *East and West: Modes of Communication, Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida*, ed. E. Chrysos and I. Wood (Leiden, 1999), 24.

416 Ibid., 24.

417 Ibid.

418 From M. Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Leviticus* (Collegeville, Minn., 1994), 203–4. Also see E. E. Urbach, "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries in the Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts, *IEJ* 9 (1959): 237 n. 37; Levine, "Sages and Synagogue," 217 (n. 125 above).

419 S. Schwartz, "Gamaliel in Aphrodite's Bath: Palestinian Judaism and Urban Culture in the Third and Fourth Centuries," in *Talmud Yerushalmi*, 1:208–9 (n. 8 above), notes that the rabbis prohibited *actions* associated with idolatry.

420 "Images as a Substitute," 31. The two sentences are reversed here for sense.

421 Ibid., 31–32.

422 From J. Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire, AD 100–450* (New York, 1998), 255. The manner in which the building and the images that decorate it are understood, convey the mystery of the Godhead; and the use of number symbolism recalls the Edessa hymn discussed above.

423 For the suggestion that the rabbinic power base began to develop during the 6th century and emerged in the medieval Christian and Islamic worlds, see Schwartz, "Rabbinization," 56 (n. 8 above).

424 Brown, "Images as a Substitute," 32–33.

425 Although some of the late antique buildings remained in use for centuries afterward; see Magness, "Question of the Synagogue," 35–36 (n. 32 above).

or misinterpreted.[426] A similar development may be detected in Judaism with the eventual triumph of the rabbinic élite, whose authority derived from their expertise in the interpretation of written texts.[427] Another factor is the Muslim conquest in the seventh century, which altered the balance of religious power in the Holy Land and divested the Christian community of its privileged position over the Jews. In the ninth century, Byzantine Christians settled the iconoclastic debate and again began to decorate their churches with images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and saints. By this time, however, Palestine was under the rule of Islam, which opposed the depiction of figured images, and the Jews of Palestine and the Diaspora were under the religious hegemony of the text-oriented, rabbinic élite. The rich figured programs of late antique synagogues disappeared and were forgotten, only to be rediscovered in the twentieth century.

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426 Brown, "Images as a Substitute," 27.

427 As Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 6 (n. 6 above), notes: "It was the birth of the hegemonic Catholic Church, however, that seems to finally have precipitated the consolidation of rabbinic Judaism as Jewish orthodoxy, with all its rivals, including the so-called Jewish Christianities, apparently largely vanquished." However, Boyarin places this watershed in the 4th century.